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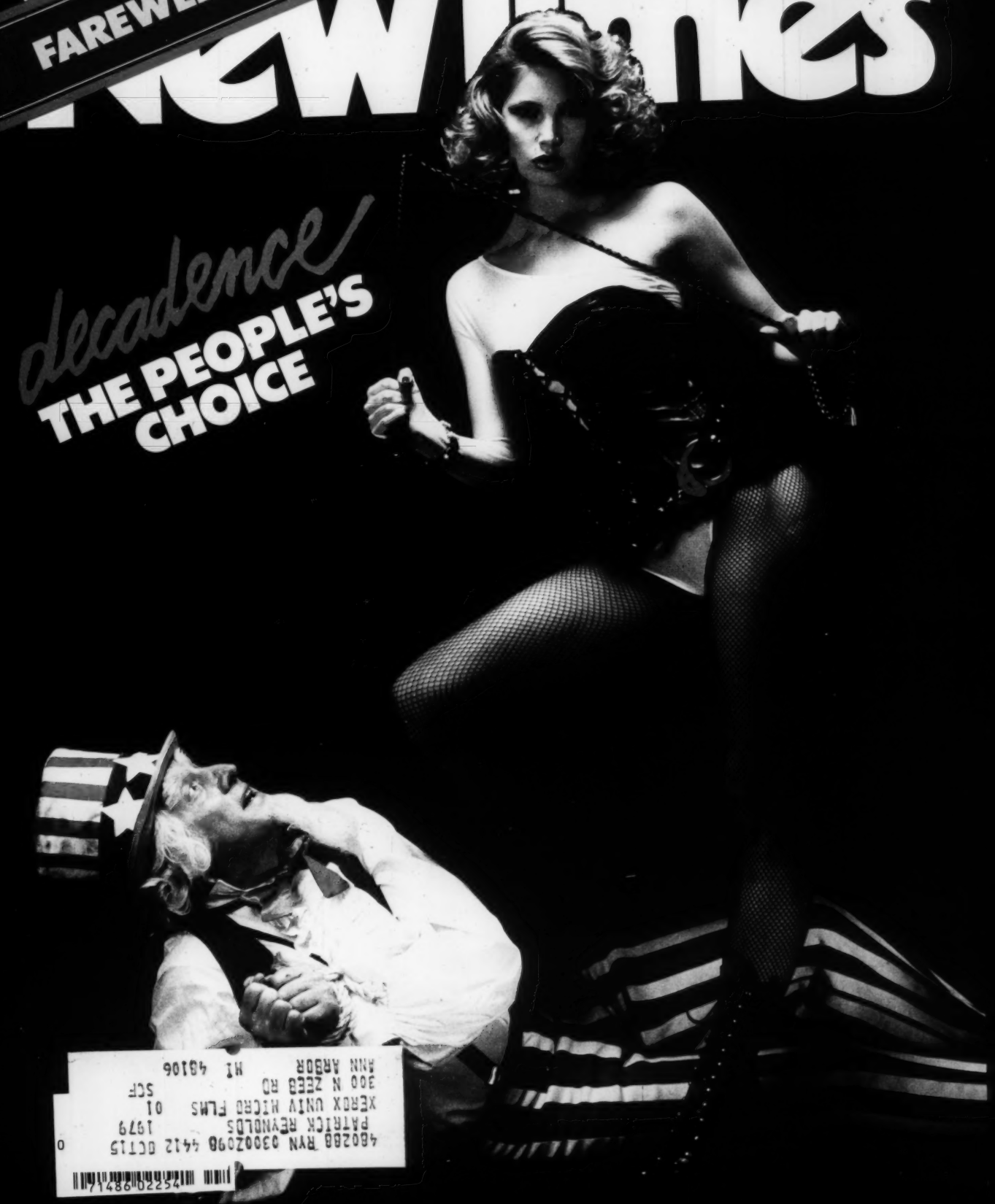

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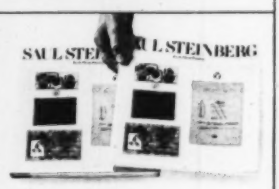

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New Times

VOLUME 12 NUMBER 1

JANUARY 8, 1979

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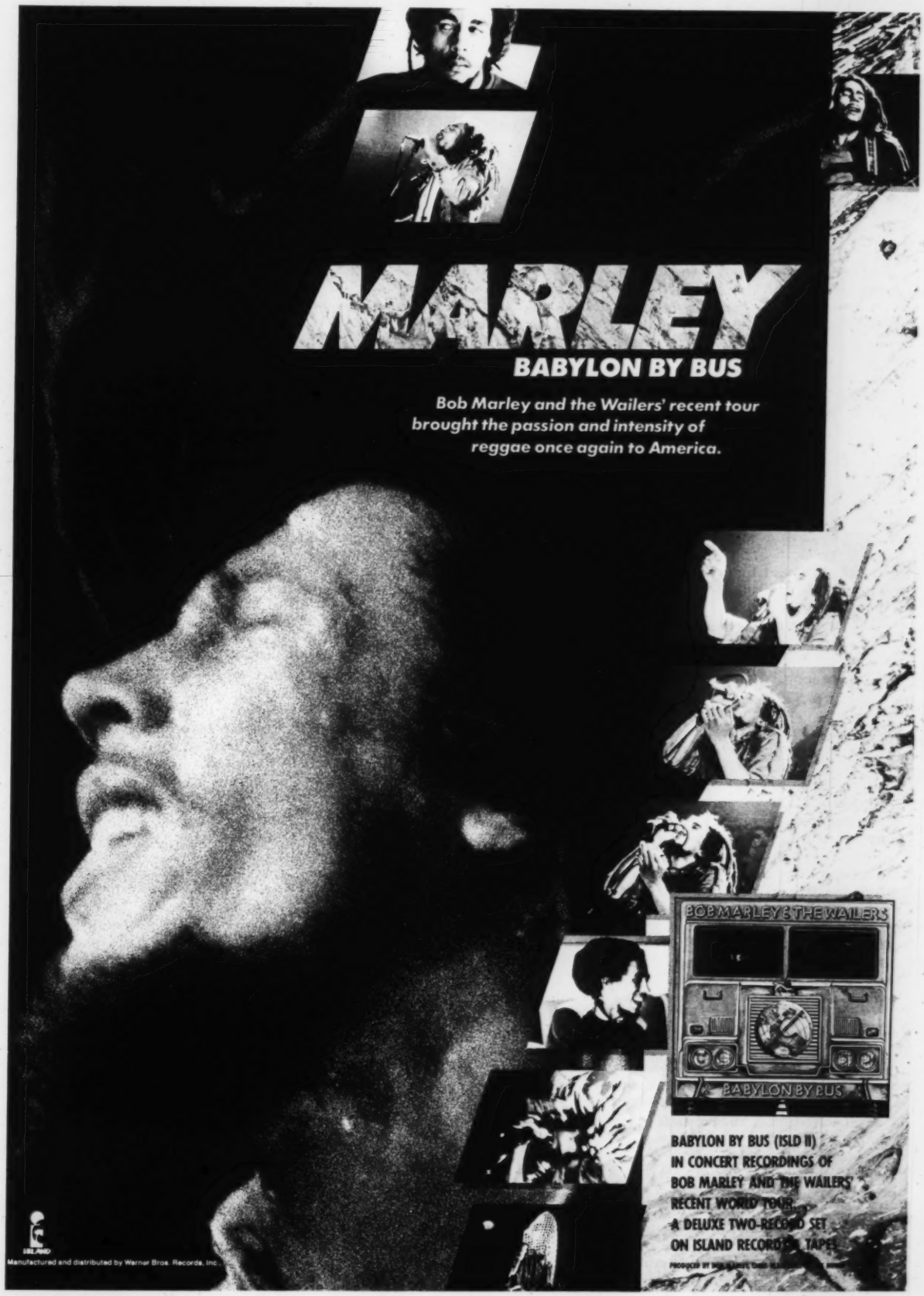
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THE END OF A DREAM

BEHIND THE SCENES

After a little more than five years, *New Times* ceases publication with this, our 138th issue. It is the end of a dream. Even during the final months when I was grappling with ways to keep the magazine alive, I felt it had never been better. The decision to close it down was the most difficult and painful one of my life.

When I first conceived of *New Times* in 1971, it seemed to me that a news-oriented magazine with in-depth reporting and tough investigative journalism would attract a respectable, if never a mass, readership. Early on, editor Jon Larsen began to develop talented young writers who needed just such an outlet for their work. It was a measure of his skills, and of the respect he earned from writers and staff members, that the magazine soon began to make its mark. We won some awards and broke some big stories, and before long I found that the guy sitting next to me on an airplane would show a touch of recognition when I mentioned our name. We were still slogging through molasses on the commercial side, but our investors were a hearty band and were there whenever we had to go back to the well. Impressed by our vitality, MCA, Inc., bought them out a year ago.

The name of the publishing game is the economics of circulation. To meet the skyrocketing costs of putting out a magazine, all publishers recently have been forced to raise subscription prices. This year, our own increases ran into resistance. Direct-mail results were disappointing, and all other circulation indicators were heading in the wrong direction. Even our basic constituency, as measured by "renewals of renewals," was going elsewhere. Clearly there were no longer enough people interested in *New Times* to make it commercially viable.

I've been around this business long enough to know that when things start to come unglued, they do so not arithmetically but geometrically. All the options were reviewed—changing the editorial approach, the format, the frequency, and so on. But these simply would have been contrivances or compromises; they did not give us a reason for being. I did not want to go through the dismal process that has plagued so many magazines when they would not acknowledge that their time was up—rumors, demoralization and erosion of quality.

Of the stories that I remember best during these past five years, one of the first was Joan Barthel's investigation of the conviction of Peter Reilly, a Connecticut teenager, for the murder of his mother. Joan's piece set in motion the process that eventually led to Peter's being freed. The most recent was Robert Sam Anson's Synanon piece, which typified *New Times* at its best—a courageous reporter, lots of legwork, clean writing and a haunting, topical subject.

Between the Barthel and Anson stories there were so many others:

- Sam Merrill's charming award-winner on the oldest living American, 133-year-old Charlie Smith.
- Bob Scheer's and Susan Lyne's newsbreaking interviews with Bill and Emily Harris during the Patty Hearst trial.
- The Insider report of the racial slurs that sent Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz back to the farm.
- Kate Coleman and Paul Avery's detailed look at the Black Panther Party in its sad and violent decline.
- Nina Totenberg's anointing of The Ten Dumbest Congressmen (after which the "King of Dumb," Senator William Scott of Virginia, held a press conference to deny the charge).
- Ron Rosenbaum's going underground to visit Abbie Hoffman.
- Lacey Fosburgh on the real Mr. Goodbar murder.
- Michael Parfit's special issue on America's New Poor.
- Robert Ward on porn kings, used-car salesmen and other equally colorful figures.

And so very much in the environmental area . . . . Larry Wright on the deteriorating quality of the nation's drinking water, Ruth Rosenbaum on the failure of the cancer establishment, Michael Drosnin on the dangers of aerosol spray cans.

Political columnist Bob Shrum, movie critics Frank Rich and Richard Corliss, book reviewer Geoffrey Wolff (who wrote a record 116 consecutive pieces in *New Times*)—each made a distinctive and significant contribution to these pages.

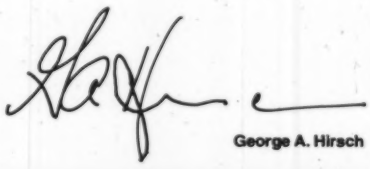
A word of special thanks goes to our advertisers, many of whom stuck with us, even though we were hot to handle and never big enough to be essential.

Finally, and most of all, thanks to you, our readers, who in recent days have overwhelmed us with letters showing that you understand what we are trying to do. One letter from David Maxey, who had been managing editor of *Look* when it folded, reflects the sentiments so many of you expressed. Maxey wrote:

"It hurts to bury a magazine. And it must hurt even more when it's your own creation.

"I heard you on radio while I was riding in a taxi. The point that struck me the most was your explanation of all the alternative, halfway measures you considered and rejected in favor of giving the magazine a dignified departure. When it's a human being whose life is ending, they sometimes write 'No Code Blue' on the chart to let those in attendance know that no extraordinary measures should be employed. That's what you did for *New Times*, and that's what dignity is about.

"It's not for me to detail all the reasons you and Jon Larsen have to be proud of what you did with the magazine. I'll only say that they are obvious to anyone in the business. It is probably the folly of people in our business to fall in love with their products, to endow magazines with some separate life of their own. But if it's our folly, it's also the glory." ●



George A. Hirsch

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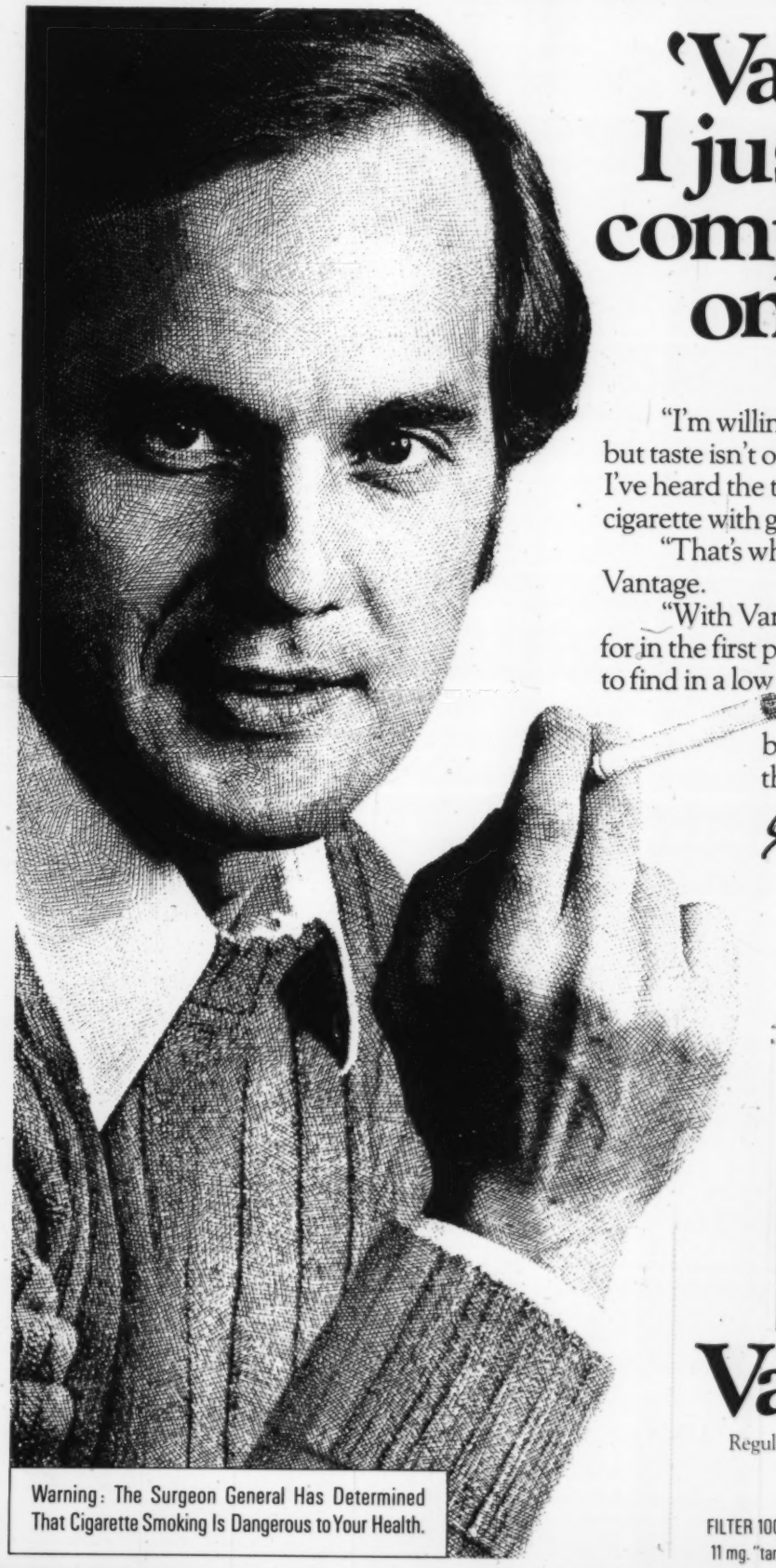

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LETTERS

Goodbye to All That

The article "Hell on Wheels" by Tony Kornheiser (November 27) is a perfect example of the sloppy thinking and writing that typifies your magazine. I love *New Times* because it is so predictable. With every issue I can be sure there will be a reference to one or all of the following: 1) Richard Nixon, 2) Legalization of marijuana, 3) Conspiracy theories on the assassination of John Kennedy, Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, 4) Some sort of slander on the CIA, FBI or other police agency. Can't you find something new? In summation, your magazine is a sensationalist, anti-intellectual piece of garbage not to be taken seriously by any thinking person.

David D. Begley

I have read an article in my local paper that has put me in a state of mild depression/near panic. *New Times*—defunct? Be consoled, knowing that many of us appreciate good writing, a sense of humor and a gutsy magazine.

Ann Opilo
Lebanon, Pennsylvania

I just read Elizabeth Kaye's article on Elvis Presley (November 13), and I haven't been so upset since he died. I never read a more sickening thing in my life.

Linda Cole
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

I heard on the radio that *New Times* is folding! I can't believe it; *New Times* is too young to die.

David Pyndus
Austin, Texas

Re: Cold War II (October 30): I would ask Mr. Kopkind just who exactly was performing the "ethical somersaults" in support of the Vietnam War. This does a grave disservice to the Jewish community, its leadership and its spokesmen, whose record of social action throughout the Indochina conflict was exemplary and pivotal in denouncing American involvement in our nation's gravest mistake of the past 25 years.

Jeffrey K. Salkin
New York, New York

Why the hell did you have to go out of business? I know why, it's because *I* subscribed. Every time I subscribe to a magazine it dies. Frankly, if I really am a jinx, I'd gladly subscribe to the Congressional Record and Presidential Documents.

Bernard J. Sussman
Washington, D.C.

I am writing in rebuttal to Bill Bishop's ignorant accusations about reclamation of strip-mined sites in East Kentucky (October 16). Cheap liberalism that labels all coal operators as bad guys does not accomplish any improvement in the quality of life in Appalachia. Carefully planned economic development will bring change, and hollow-fill is critical to that development. You come on down and see us, Bill. We'll show you what we're talking about.

Anita Blosser
Noctor, Kentucky

As a longtime subscriber to *New Times*, I can hardly contain my outrage. Blasphemy! A stab in the back! We, the people who participated in *New Times*' successes and failures, were not even aware our friend was sick, much less terminally ill. Now, at this late date, we are informed the doctors have prescribed euthanasia. How can this be?

Jim Sinclair
Indianola, Iowa

Please cancel my subscription. As a mother and parent, I choose not to have such articles in my home.

Mrs. T.G. Hughes
San Angelo, Texas

New Times had become a friend; constant, dependable, but unpredictable at the same time. Not, of course, always equally satisfying, but never dull or complacent. The Tuesday after next, when *New Times* is not waiting for me, will be a sad, sad day.

Frank Francisconi
New London, Connecticut

We were shocked, not to mention disappointed, to see an advertisement by Exxon advocating nuclear fuel pellets in your October 16 issue. You who wrote the first comprehensive article on the burgeoning anti-nuclear movement. We can appreciate the necessity of solid advertising, but please don't insult your readers and humiliate yourselves with this hypocritical display.

Patricia Lippe
Hilary Snell
Bronxville, New York

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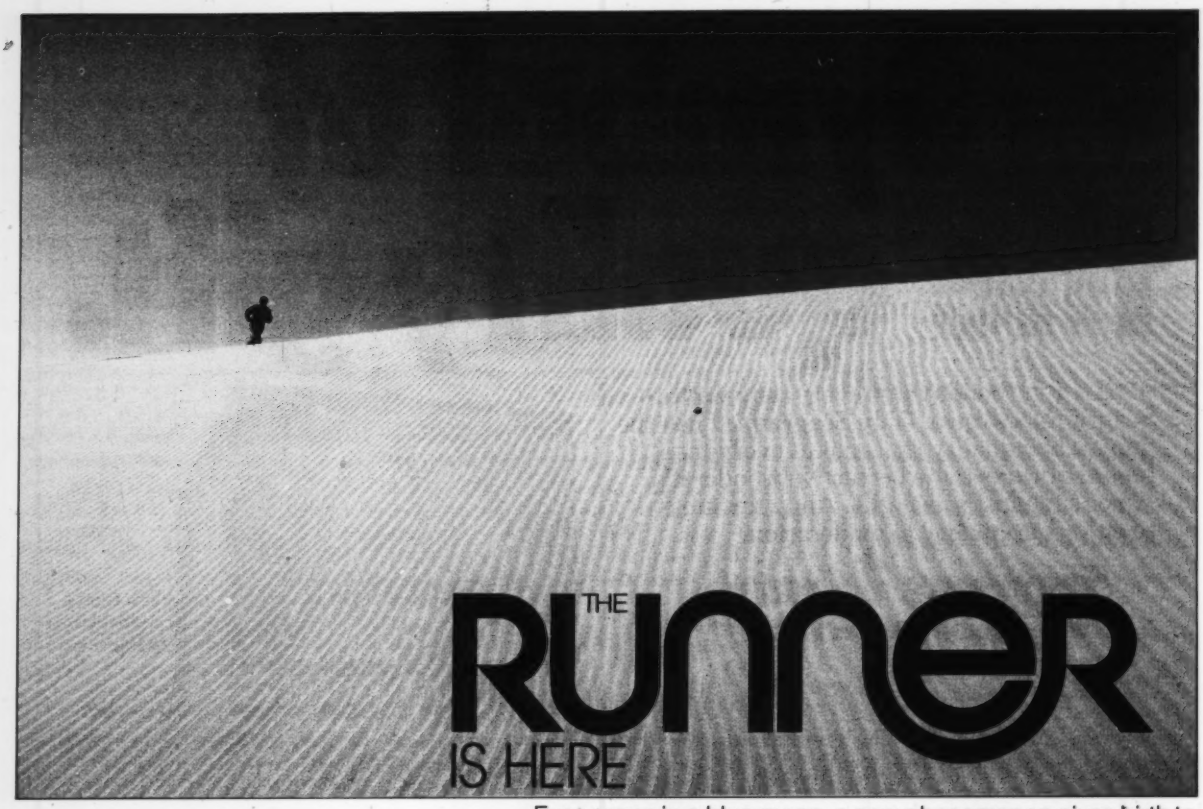

Every once in a blue moon, a new phenomenon gives birth to an exceptional magazine. In the late '50s, and early '60s, the explosion of spectator sports created a need and a market for *Sports Illustrated*. In the late '60s, it was rock music...and *Rolling Stone*. Now it's the end of the '70s, a time that has seen an entire nation take to its feet. More than 20 million Americans (according to the latest Gallup Poll) are off and running and we have created a new magazine for those who share this, the fastest growing of participant sports.

Called *THE RUNNER,* this new monthly brings you articles not just on running and runners, but on health, biology, and the entire state of mind running expresses. We take as our premise that running is far more than another participant sport; it is an entire subculture, and possibly even a subversive one.

We hope to knock your sweat socks off with the sort of writing and graphics you'll find in no other running publication, and in few other sports magazines; and we'll pull them up again with the latest reports on sports medicine, nutrition, diet and physiology.

With such Contributing Editors as Frank Shorter, Bill Rodgers and Nina Kuscsik, *THE RUNNER* will be with you, toe to toe, at all the major running events, and at many that are of no consequence at all—but are delightful to read about.

So, we hope you get the picture: a magazine for runners but not just about running; a magazine that will probably never cure your athlete's foot, but will always scratch that itch in your soul. If we may quote Dr. George A. Sheehan, "I was seeking a new world, where I could live and create my own drama...I found it in running." We hope you'll find a new world of drama and excitement in our magazine.

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ADDENDA & ERRATA

Synanon Founder Arrested. As Robert Sam Anson reported in our November 27 cover story, Synanon founder Charles Dederich has had a life of ups and downs. In early December he experienced another one of the downs: Police in Lake Havasu City, Arizona, acting on a Los Angeles County warrant, arrested Dederich on charges of conspiracy to commit murder, conspiracy to commit assault and solicitation to commit murder. He now faces extradition to California.

The charges stem from an incident described in Anson's story. Last October, Los Angeles lawyer Paul Morantz was bitten and nearly killed by a rattlesnake that had been placed in his mailbox. He had just helped win a $300,000 default judgment against Synanon for two of his clients, who had charged false imprisonment, brainwashing and kidnapping. Synanon denied any involvement in the attack on Morantz, but later two members were arrested and charged with conspiracy to commit murder.

The decision to arrest the 66-year-old Dederich was made after police searched a Synanon facility in Badger, California, several weeks ago and seized ten tape recordings. One of them, apparently recorded on September 5, 1977, is labeled "Court. New religious posture—don't fuck with Synanon." A spokesman for the Los Angeles County district attorney's office declines to reveal what the tapes contain, except to say that the September 5 tape includes Dederich's voice and that the material is "pertinent to the charges against him."

Press accounts reported that Dederich was intoxicated at the time of his arrest and was taken from his home on a stretcher. His lawyer, Thomas Thinnes, while not directly confirming these accounts, says, "If all it was was intoxication, then he'd just have to sober up and there would be no problem." But Thinnes says Dederich does have a problem: He has been under psychiatric care for depression and may have lost touch with reality. Thinnes is trying to block extradition, in part on the grounds that Dederich is not well enough to stand trial.

As we go to press, Dederich is in a Phoenix hospital after being released on $100,000 bail. His extradition hearing is scheduled for January 2. ●

continued from page 6

I'm writing in reaction to your October 30 article, "The Nightmare of Hugh Rivers, Jr." I was deeply moved with the frank approach to the horrifying aspects of the mental care institutions and lack of understanding how to treat it. I came away from the article trembling.

Jackie Lincoln
Fremont, California

Is the CIA forcing you out of business? Or are you just a victim of 20th-century capitalism? (Or both?)

Elizabeth Grant
Brooklyn, New York

I was surprised that Robert Shrum saw fit to repeat, in his article about "The New Nihilism" (October 30), the discredited aphorism that it is impossible to cut taxes without cutting vital services. Certainly the aftermath of Proposition 13 in California proves this to be wrong. Mr. Shrum demonstrates, by his apparent ignorance of these and other facts, a profound economic knownothingism—which is made possible by a mindless and almost reflexive commitment to ever more government spending.

Ted Paliobeis
North Olmsted, Ohio

Thank you for the five years. Try it again soon.

Bob Hunter
Dayton, Ohio

It's ironic that a magazine of the caliber of *New Times* reportedly is departing with an issue devoted to decadence. In your sleazy history, you have stood as the epitome of anything-for-a-buck journalism purveyed behind an all-too-transparent guise of holier-than-thou "truth seeking." Wise up, you cretins. *New Times* is decadence.

Goodbye, and good riddance.

M. Blyskal
Ballston Spa, New York

I am depressed to the point of tears. If *New Times* can afford to send me back issues to finish out my subscription, that is what I would like to have.

I've been weak and hard like an oak,
I've seen pretty people disappear like smoke.
Friends may arrive . . . Friends may disappear.
If you want me, honey baby, I'll be here. . . .

Bob Dylan, of course.

Thanks anyway. . . .

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NewTimes

decadence

America Shrugged

Welcome to America. Our Miss Shields will show you to your table. Such a pretty baby.

What'll it be? Have a drink, have a puff, have a snort, have some smack. Legalized gambling in the front room, skinflicks in the back, mirrors, mirrors everywhere in glorious profusion.

C'mon in. Something for every palate. Reproductions by Rockefeller, Senators by David Garth, exploding Pintos by Ford. Hey, and that's not all. Carcinogens in 31 flavors. Opium from Saint Laurent, Seconals from Graceland, polyvinyl vaginas from Larry Flynt. . . . Funky, punky, junky—you want it, we got it.

See the mayor of San Francisco shot dead in his office, see the homosexual supervisor dying down the hall, see 900 bodies bloating in the jungle sun. Parental guidance suggested. Get your top hat and your spike heels, grab a whip, grab a chain, and get it on for *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. Sorry, Norman Rockwell doesn't live here anymore.

Join the looters in New York, a police strike in Memphis, an orgy in L.A. Say hello to Harry Reems, get a rattlesnake by mail. (Who invited Solzhenitsyn?) Catch some herpes, get a facelift, rent-a-boy. Watch Linda Blair being raped with a plumber's helper/Linda Blair vomiting on a priest/Linda Blair masturbating with a crucifix. Check it out.

There's something in the air—a sense of slippage, the perfume of decay. Life is slick and bright and noisy, but there's a softness here, a crumbling behind the gloss. Chuck Barris is the man of the hour. Tacky? Sure he's tacky, but he's having a swell time. Chuck Barris is *perfect*.

Disco, with its red-raw beat and endless climaxes, is the anthem of the seventies. High voltage, quick hits, that's what we want, nuance and texture can wait. It doesn't have to be good—we're talking bottom line here. We have raised image over substance and reduced sensuality to its crudest, most efficient forms. Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, my rod and my vibrator comfort me.

Come July it will be ten years since Neil Armstrong stepped on the moon—and ten years since Teddy Kennedy and Mary Jo Kopechne rode off Dike Bridge. Of the two events, Chappaquiddick far better presaged the decade ahead. It was so callous, so sloppy.

We shrug off almost everything now, moving on—with a lot of help from the omnivorous media—to the next fleeting titillation. Fur ads in *Vogue* feature women being attacked by Dobermans. Shrug. Bianca Jagger, Billy Carter, Gary Gilmore—all hype, show, diversion. There's a new rock group called The Dead Kennedys. Shrug.

It's as if we're beyond making distinctions, beyond caring. Do Teddy's celebrated indiscretions continue? No problem—his Gallup ratings have never been higher. Third-graders are selling dope, White House aides are buying it. Our appetite for violence is insatiable. Sid Vicious is just a mixed-up kid.

Exhausted from our exertions of the sixties, all we ask for now is relief. Six hours of TV helps to get us through the day—life once removed is close enough, thanks. The impetus to rethink-reform-transform has long since slid into the ennui. After two centuries, we have reached a consensus of indifference.

"We do it all for you"—*that's* the spirit of '79. Proposition 13, with its shimmering promise of something for nothing, is a metaphor for the times. The beauty of Werner Erhard's PR project to end world hunger is that *you don't have to do a thing*. Small wonder Jerry Brown is our quintessential politician. Liberal, conservative, Jesuit, Buddhist—Jerry will give us what we want. No sweat.

Don't think about it. Don't think about anything. Turn up the volume, have another toke, honk if you're horny. Say, *heeeeeere's* Johnny-Dolly-Reggie-Woody-Angie-Amy-Betty-Donny-Chevy-Henry-Goldie-Liz and O.J. Immerse yourself in their glossy, empty lives, all the better to forget your own. Jackie oh Jackie oh Jackie *ohhhh*. . . . There are almost no famous people anymore, only celebrities—"personalities." Fame is passé—it is much too solid, too suggestive of steady achievement. There still are ripples of grace and distinction, commitment and courage, but all seem in shorter supply now. It's no time for heroes. Bob Dylan at Caesar's Palace, coming soon.

And when you can't get it up for all the stars Steve Rubell ever dreamed of, when the fevers of a thousand Saturday nights and all the massage parlors in Wichita still aren't enough, there remains surrender body and soul to an Emperor Jones. Like the man said, choose your poison.

Aw, the hell with it, forget it, we'll just ease on down the road. And, hey, welcome to America, drinks are on the house. Bottoms up. ●

Photograph by John Bean

Enough Already

Creating zombies in the name of social utopia.

by Robert Scheer

decadence

Sitting in the anteroom of the People's Temple in San Francisco three days after the Guyana massacre, I could hear attorney Charles Garry arguing with the Temple's survivors in the next room. He was insisting that they end their isolation and talk to the press, which at that precise moment was me.

Suddenly I didn't want to be the press. I no longer cared about the explanations that would be offered by these puppets whose strings had been cut. Questions about a movement that had managed to take both Christ's and Marx's names in vain no longer seemed to matter now.

A day earlier I had conducted a telephone interview with one of the true believers, whose husband had died in Guyana. She still insisted that Reverend Jim Jones was "the greatest humanitarian the world had ever seen." What startled me was that these words came from an obviously intelligent person who had been sucked into this madness and was still lost. These people were trained by Jones never to say "enough." Like the Moonies, and Hare Krishnas who haunt the airports, they had surrendered their common sense and their humor—qualities that in recent history are turning out to be more important than one's ideology. Maybe they were always more important.

When San Francisco's mayor and supervisor were gunned down in City Hall several days later, one friend of theirs said, "Thank God it's a right-wing nut this time." Not very funny. But Mayor Moscone and Supervisor Milk might have chuckled anyway. They were both to the left of the political spectrum and were often held accountable for the antics of crazies posing as social idealists. Moscone was subjected to particularly vicious attack after the massacre at Jonestown for having accepted the support of the People's Temple and appointing Jones head of the San Francisco Housing Authority. The Reverend Jones threw his shock troops into a myriad of liberal causes and, in return, received approval from prominent Democrats including Joseph Califano and Rosalynn Carter.

The People's Temple had power because the death of the civil rights and peace movements had left a vacuum on the grassroots level. Jones realized this early and sought to cop the Left franchise. With a melange of Christian do-gooderism, faith healing, racial integration and socialist rhetoric, he recruited successfully among the wounded veterans of the sixties youth culture and even more successfully among the black poor, who made up more than 80 percent of his followers.

It all seemed so reasonable, except for one horribly unreasonable fact: The man was a totalitarian.

It is not a new story for the Left. The birthright of progressive idealism has been thrown away time after time to the spirit of totalitarianism because the exigencies of the moment seemed to demand that. This was the sad, horrific saga of the pro-Communist Left, which ended in apologizing for the most ghastly acts of Stalin—the same Old Left that had termed concern for individual freedoms and the desire to limit bureacratic power "bourgeois democracy." First Amendment restraints were deemed necessary to preserve freedom under capitalism, but never in the promised land of the socialist utopia.

Well, there is only one kind of democracy, and either you have it or you don't. Democracy means that people are not to have their essential wit and insights mangled by state, church or corporation. And that manipulation can occur under any economic system and in the name of any god or cause. Eternal vigilance against the SOBs is the only safeguard (and anyone who presumes to have power over other people is potentially a SOB, be he Jim Jones, Nixon, you or me.) My own serious mistakes as an activist leave me all too aware of how easy it is to rationalize error. Such experiences should be sufficient to make one a born-again believer in the spirit of the First Amendment.

The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution is not a manifestation of bourgeois society but rather the fundamental insight into making the human condition tolerable. The New Left of the sixties, as it first appeared in the civil rights and antiwar movements, made this perception its unifying cry, along with a strong belief in social justice. It was this profoundly felt democratic, anti-elitist spirit that guided the early SDS, the Free Speech movement, Women for Peace and every other large Left grouping of the sixties. In retrospect it will seem the healthiest period of American political life.

Many of that era are still loyal to the New Left democratic tradition. They are anonymous organizers in factories, protesters against unbridled nuclear power, active proponents of women's rights, people attempting to make the dreams of the civil rights movement a reality. But their work is overshadowed by crazies who make better copy.

The New Left was born as a movement against alienation. Its memory is now mocked by a scattering of groups that foster the alienation of the individual, not only from institutions but from themselves. People's Temple is just the latest in a series of movements that aim to create zombies in the name of establishing some social utopia.

It can never make any sense. It is like fancying the fruit of a diseased tree. The process perverts that which is most healthy about the human spirit—our individual capacity for growth, development, mystery and passion—and would turn us into uniform mush.

If reading Marx and Mao can give rise to that, then it is necessary to temper them by reading John Stuart Mill, Bertrand Russell and Martin Luther King. But perhaps that is too simple. Jones read more of Christ than he did of Marx, and it is Martin Luther King's picture that dominates the hallway of People's Temple. Indeed, we now know that Jones never permitted his disciples to actually read Marx or any other author. It was all interpreted for them in Jones' endless, rambling tirades.

What the crazies do have in common is their distortion of ideas, and indeed history, in order to leave themselves at the center of our attention. They have a contempt for ordinary life, for the right and the ability of individuals to make rational decisions. They become humorless, fanatical "saviors" of our souls. It finally doesn't matter if they claim to be of the Left or the Right, for Christ or against him—they are inevitably the destroyers of life. ●

Robert Scheer is a Los Angeles Times *reporter and a former political columnist for this magazine.*

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Unborn Again

The Catholic Church hits the hustings

by Robert Shrum

decadence When I was a child in the Catholic Church, once a year we stood during Sunday mass to take the pledge of the Legion of Decency, promising to avoid "condemned" movies and those classified as "morally objectionable in part." *The Moon Is Blue*, for example, was judged mortally sinful because one character spoke the word "virginity," which presumably threatened to tempt us into losing ours. No one in the Church's hierarchy ever asked us to stand against the bomb, or racial bigotry, or the excesses of McCarthyism; to the contrary, there were bishops and cardinals who tolerated and even sponsored some or all of these indecencies.

Today, however, movies incur but small maledictions. Now the Church's prelates are leading a crusade for a constitutional amendment to make abortion a federal offense. In parochial schools, a rewritten Pledge of Allegiance concludes "with liberty and justice for all, the born and the unborn." On lobbying trips to Washington, Catholic schoolchildren ask members of Congress to look at pictures of aborted fetuses and to listen to fetal heartbeats on portable cassette recorders. Increasingly, the anti-abortionists—led by the Church—are taking electoral revenge on those who do not hear and heed the message, regardless of their overall record. "They would prefer Attila the Hun, if he was against abortion, to Thomas Jefferson, if he doubted the wisdom of their amendment," says one Democratic campaign consultant.

Catholic officials insist that the anti-abortion crusade includes Protestants and Jews as well. But a priest at the headquarters of the United States Catholic Conference concedes the movement has been both "directed and supported by the bishops." The New York bishops arranged for collections at every Catholic church in the state to finance New York's Right to Life group, as well as to contribute to the national campaign for an anti-abortion amendment to the Constitution. Parish bulletins in Iowa this fall branded Senator Dick Clark, regarded by his colleagues as one of the best people in the Senate, as "anti-life" because he does not believe that such an amendment can or should impose a minority's moral judgment when wide disagreement on the issue will inevitably continue. The anti-abortionists take credit for the unexpected defeat of Clark and that of New Hampshire Senator Thomas McIntyre; both men were replaced by "pro-life" conservatives who oppose medical care, food stamps and occupational safety.

Even politicians who follow the anti-abortionists' line may not be deemed pure enough. Governor Rudy Perpich of Minnesota blocked public funds for abortion, but shortly before November's election the anti-abortion lobby blanketed the state with pamphlets endorsing Perpich's opponent, a congressman who had done even better by cosponsoring the constitutional amendment against abortion. "There is no ground for compromise," mourns a political strategist for one senator who will face the anti-abortionists' wrath in 1980. "They've cut off medicare funds for most abortions, but [the anti-abortionists] won't settle for that. They want a constitutional amendment—or else."

But there may be an indulgence for sale. Dick Clark blames his defeat on his opposition to tuition tax credits for parochial schools more than his position on abortion. Political analyst Alan Baron agrees: "The critical mass is formed when you couple the fanatics on abortion with moderate Catholics angry about the tax credit issue." Thus New York Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Wisconsin's Gaylord Nelson have escaped Catholic retribution because, even though they oppose an anti-abortion amendment, they favor tax credits. (Other senators are now developing a new tax credit proposal so that they can plausibly switch positions and support the new formulation by claiming that, unlike previous versions, this one is consistent with the First Amendment's mandate to separate church and state.)

The National Right to Life Committee, which seems at least as dedicated to the New Right as to life, has picked five senators, all liberals, including George McGovern and Frank Church, as prime targets for the 1980 elections. (Officials of the U.S. Catholic Conference urged in vain that the committee list a conservative as well.) The anti-abortion crusaders in general still have not confronted the question that an anti-Vietnam War senator asked Cardinal Terrence Cooke, who was preaching to him about abortion in 1972: "Why does the Church seem to worry so much more about the killing of human beings not yet born than of human beings who are already alive?"

A survey conducted recently by the Quixote Center, a Catholic research institute outside Washington, D.C., has concluded that what really underlies the anti-abortionists' position is their objection to sexual freedom. The Center's co-directors reported: "The data suggest that many of those in the movement see abortion at the deepest psychological level less as a taking of human life than as a practice threatening to existing social patterns and customs in families, marriages and sexual relations."

The hypocrisy of the Pharisees in the Temple represents another, less obvious form of decadence. Self-righteously branding senators such as Clark or McIntyre as "murderers" comes with a grace that is not sanctifying from a Church whose Pope embraced Mussolini and abided Hitler, and whose Cardinal Archbishop of New York blessed the Vietnam War. Perhaps the Church should remember the words of John Kennedy, drafted with the help of the great Jesuit theologian John Courtney Murray, spoken during the 1960 presidential campaign to allay the fears of ecclesiastical interference in public policy. "I believe in America," Kennedy said, "where no Catholic prelate . . . and no Protestant minister would tell his parishioners for whom to vote." ●

Clark: "Pro-life" victim

Photograph by Dennis Brack /Black Star

WHEN EVERYTHING ELSE HAS QUIETED DOWN

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IMPORTED FROM FRANCE.

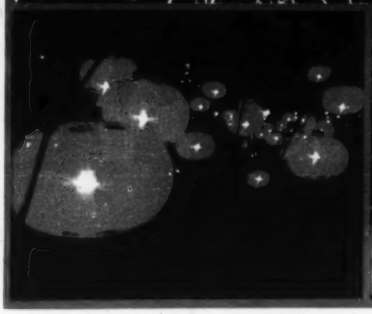
Cointreau

Cointreau Liqueur 80 Proof Renfield Importers, Ltd. © Cointreau Corp., 1977

Let Them Sniff Opium

With banners waving and fireworks blazing, Yves Saint Laurent gave a $250,000 party to peddle his $100-an-ounce perfume

by Judith Adler Hennessee



decadence

Opium: 71 percent ethyl alcohol and water—standard proportions for all perfumes; 10 to 15 percent clove-oil extracts; some artificial jasmine and benzoin, a fixative; plus vetiver, myrrh, sandalwood, benjamin, pepper, coriander and opopanax—"Most of these are barely detectable, perhaps one drop in a vat of 200 gallons," according to Charles Vitaco of American Standards Testing Bureau, Inc. "It's like a pinch of this and a pinch of that."

They called it "the launch of the century," a spectacular gala, a quarter-million-dollar monument to *haut* excess. It was a night to go down in the annals of ephemera, the night of September 20,1978, when Yves Saint Laurent came to New York to peddle Opium, the $100-an-ounce perfume of mystery, romance, seduction, dreams. . . .

The tall ship *Peking* (built in 1911), rented from the South Street Seaport Museum for the occasion, was transformed into a floating fantasy—Xanadu on the East River—with dozens of banners hanging from the four masts, floating in the breeze, in red, gold, gold lamé and purple; a 1,000-pound bronze Buddha; thousands of white cattleya orchids flown in from Hawaii; a disco, six bars and mountains of food.

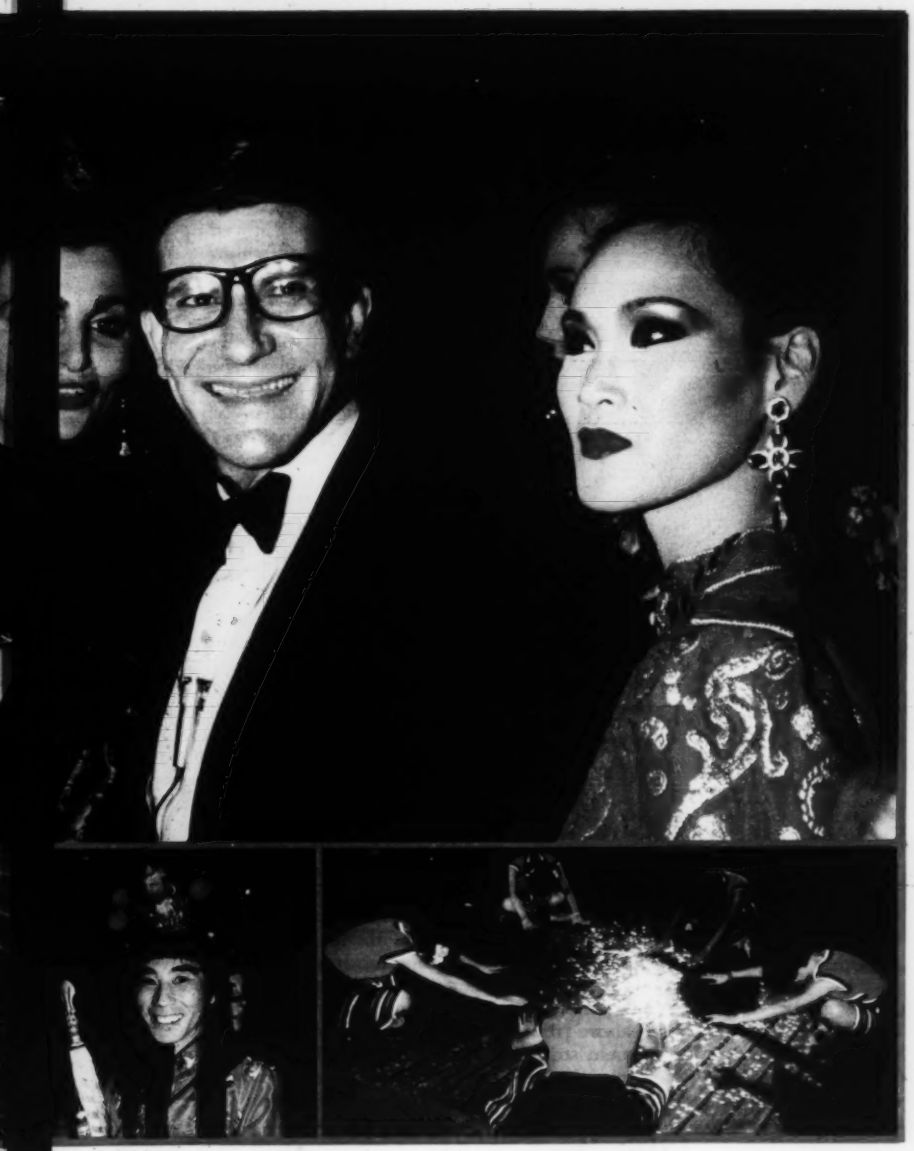
There were more oysters than anyone could eat, more champagne than anyone could drink, more entertainment than anyone could watch and more jealousy than anyone could measure. "If there's a disaster," one guest was heard to remark, "Bloomingdale's will close tomorrow. All of its customers are here."

First launched in Paris a year ago by a company called Mafia (a name doubtless chosen with the same careful thought that Saint Laurent bestowed on the name Opium), the perfume captivated the French and achieved a certain notoriety even before it arrived in the United States—it was banned in Australia because the name misrepresents the contents. The ad alone is enough to set every federal agent in this country bristling: an elegant, jewel-bedecked reclining model wearing a $6,000 black velvet and gold gown designed by Saint Laurent, giving the unmistakable impression of being zonked out of her mind. The copy reads: "*Pour celles qui s'adonnent à Yves Saint Laurent.*" *Pour celles qui* don't know French, *s'adonnent* translates into "addicted." (It can also mean "devoted.")

In drug-crazed America, the name caused convulsions among the executives of E.R. Squibb & Sons, Inc., an old and conservative drug company that owns Charles of the Ritz, the distributor of YSL fragrances. For Squibb, a rose by any other name would have smelled sweeter, but Saint Laurent insisted. It was Opium or nothing. "Saint Laurent thought it was a very commercial name," said an industry insider. "After all, he's in the business of knowing what sells at that level." Richard Furlaud, Squibb's chairman of the board, was

Judith Adler Hennessee is a freelance writer based in New York who happens to "love" Opium perfume.

Photograph at top by Ron Galella; others by Lynn Karlin



shocked. "A pharmaceutical company is not likely to have a perfume called Opium with a French advertising agency called Mafia," he explained. "It creates a spectacular opportunity to be misunderstood." But there was the poem, a 12-page reverie, redolent of the Arabian desert and Imperial China, indolence and exoticism, written by Saint Laurent to express his feelings about the perfume. The poem, said Furlaud, finally convinced him that the name Opium had nothing to do with illegal drugs.

And so the dramatis personae assembled to recreate The Mysterious East. There was Saint Laurent himself, described by one participant as "a fragile blossom," who exchanged sketches across the Atlantic with Renny Reynolds, who "did" the party. Reynolds is a florist, decorator and maker of "magna" parties for Studio 54, New York's magna disco. Magna is the essence of the 1978 party. "It's the feeling," said Reynolds. His parties are noted for their grandiose effects, their larger-than-life quality—like the bronze caryatids he hauled in and painted white for the Diana Ross party, or the circus party for Valentino. "People arrived on horses. There were horses on the dance floor. It was bizarre," noted Reynolds. "Parties at Studio 54 have to get bigger and bigger in order to attract the attention of the press. Attracting the attention of the press is the name of the game."

Reynolds had some magna ideas that were thought inappropriate for what the Opium image demanded. The banners, for instance: "Yves wanted banners and I wanted gold lamé sails," he said. "It would have been more spectacular. The banners were the only thing that threw me. At least 20 banners were hanging from each mast. Strung up, they looked a little like ribbons." And the lions: "My idea was to have lions in cages. The ship would look like an old China cargo ship, the cargo being mostly opium, and there would be giant crates saying MADE IN CHINA, and everyone would hear the roar of lions, lions being part of the cargo, too. But Marina" —Marina Schiano, who runs the YSL couture in New York, the Dragon Lady, Cerberus at the Gate and guardian of the image—"felt it would be too circus-like. She wanted elegance, and felt it might detract."

"Marina operates in an Italian manner—screaming and yelling and stamping her feet. She is either a pussycat or ferocious, *une femme formidable*," said one of the party planners.

In the Squibb corner were the aforementioned Furlaud; Martin Schmidt, president of Charles of the Ritz, described as being "not with the flow" and "lacking a feeling of extravagance"; and his minions, Charles of the Ritz vice president Mark Laracy and Kristina Wrba, YSL marketing vice president. And in the middle, Cathy Cash Spellman of the Spellman advertising agency, trader in images, who, with her husband, Joseph Spellman, used to work at Revlon. Joe also worked at YSL's arch-rival in fragrances, Estée Lauder.

With Squibb/Charles of the Ritz not being with the flow and Schiano carrying on in an "Italian" manner, the planning sessions took on the aura of a battlefield. (*Women's Wear Daily*, with its knack for felicitous phrases, called it "The Opium Wars.") The cost of the launch soared majestically from about $100,000 to $250,000 (and, according to some estimates, upward into the $300,000 empyrean). They fought about the date, the invitation list (Young Chic, Old Social, Couture, Stores, Media), whether Estée Lauder should be invited, whether the launch should end at Studio 54 and other matters too numerous to mention; and finally, Marina Schiano, a lady who knows what she wants and how to get it, threatened the unthinkable: Either she would get her way or Saint Laurent wouldn't come to the party. "In the end," said the industry insider, "Marina had the high card."

Eight hundred hand-addressed invitations ($2,000) had been delivered by messenger ($1,500) to an extravagant list of people. Everyone from the President and Vice President to Yul Brynner, Candice Bergen and Mikhail Baryshnikov was invited, though Cher was the only major personality who made an appearance. Long sleek black limousines lined the South Street Pier, glamorized for the occasion with a YSL banner hanging over the archway. The guests—men in dinner jackets, women in luxurious, sybaritic clothes—sexy, slithering gowns with plunging necklines and bag-

A Little Help From His Friend: Truman Capote propped up by Marion Javits

gy, flimsy pants, tight at the ankles—paraded onto the ship under a 300-foot canopy adorned with Chinese lanterns of red and gold silk, their path strewn with rose petals, while denizens of the neighborhood gathered to gape. "Everyone was fascinated," one of them said afterwards. "The banners streaming from the masts, lit by an eerie mauve-red light, shadowy figures on deck, music wafting across the waters. . . ."

Giant temple arches 18 feet high, supported by four-foot-square pillars, guarded the entrance to the gangplank, at the top of which the guests paused at a little platform to be photographed making their entrance. Halston came with Cher, who was wearing a transparent black dress and a frizzy hairdo. She looked bored, someone said. The Seventh Avenue contingent was there: Bill Blass, Calvin Klein, Mary McFadden, Pauline Trigère in a gold jacket, Diane von Furstenberg, Oscar and Françoise de la Renta. Zandra Rhodes, famed for her green hair, came from England. "She has no eyebrows," wrote the Philadelphia *Bulletin*. "The places where they were are connected by a penciled 'ZZZZ' (for Zandra?) line above the bridge of her nose." Department store execs came. Diana Vreeland was there, wearing a high-necked brocade gown and long jade earrings—or coral earrings, depending on the light; Divine, whirling like a dervish, wearing a black beaded dress with his shaved head, an earring in one ear; Truman Capote, escorting socialite Jan Cushing and wearing a deerstalker hat and matching jacket, and observed by everyone to be drunk. Capote, a connoisseur of extravagance, was asked by a reporter, "Isn't this decadent?" No, said Capote, who couldn't see anything decadent about "mature people having fun with their clothes on."

As they and assorted crashers tripped by, a party of six from the South Street Seaport Museum, headed by Christopher Lowery, vice president of operations, stood and suffered a dreadful snub. None of the museum people had received formal invitations; instead, they had been invited verbally. Someone, however, had forgotten to notify the bouncers at the gate of the arrangement. So, while Lowery and company were obliged to cool their heels at the gangplank for 20 minutes or so, people from the advertising agency scurried around to verify them. "We were mad as hell," said a member of the group.

Saint Laurent was surrounded by a harem of six imported mannequins, black, white and yellow, in geisha-like maquillage, sumptuously attired in Oriental splendor—brocade trimmed with fur, feathers, sequins; black, red and gold gowns of silk and satin; beads and embroidery. They stood in front of a spectacular 8 × 12 garden of bamboo poles covered with thousands of white cattleya orchids and smilax, a delicate light-green trailing vine that was used in Victorian wedding bouquets. "It's outrageously expensive," said Reynolds. The bill for the flowers alone came to $50,000. Each orchid was individually wired into a tube of water to prevent wilting, and, as the evening wore on, guests picked them and passed them around. The handrails of the ship were draped with fishnets and huge cone-shaped straw baskets filled with white, yellow and orange lilies from the Netherlands, wired together and spilling out luxuriantly, like a cornucopia. (Orchids and lilies are Saint Laurent's favorite flowers.) A dozen people spent the day of the party arranging just the flowers.

On the "reception deck," the main area for milling about, the floor was covered by a 50-foot sisal rug designed by YSL on which were sewn 8-inch-wide bands of grosgrain ribbon in regal Oriental reds and purples. Bamboo furniture sat on the rug, hand-painted to match the hundreds of hand-painted fans, some of them wired to the mast, in black, gold, reds and purples with squiggly lines like a Japanese Jackson Pollock. The guests, a light-fingered bunch, went to extraordinary lengths to unwire them and take them home. The level of stealing was as extravagant as the party. It usually is at such high-class affairs. The attitude is similar to that of guests stealing towels from a hotel. By the end of the Opium evening, thousands of dollars' worth of lanterns, fans, trays and baskets had vanished. Charles of the Ritz had agreed to supply the needed security, but it was not supplied. At one point rather late in the evening, someone noticed that a truck had pulled up to the dock and begun loading.

Everyone was "on" for the press, without which the party would not have taken place. The fashion, style, living and lifestyle reporters from the newspapers and magazines covered the party; and the BBC, *60 Minutes*, New York's Channel 5 and all three networks sent camera crews. Hot on the scent of publicity, those whom *People* magazine called "the rag trade royalty" crowded around the cameras to be interviewed, but the cameras only had eyes for Saint Laurent and

Photograph by Ron Galella

his Oriental entourage. One after another, television journalists took their turns filming him against a background of orchids and bamboo, asking the same questions over and over. He grinned madly and patted his head, as if to make sure it was still there, while fielding dozens of questions from reporters interrupting one another.

Reporter: Why did you choose the name Opium?
YSL (whose English is fragmented): "Opium for me is a mystery of the Orient . . . *exoticisme*, it evokes the *poésie* of the 19th century . . . Baudelaire, Rimbaud . . .
Reporter: Why is the party so important to the idea of the perfume?
YSL: It is a *fête*, an occasion to meet all of my friends . . .
Reporter: Isn't it somewhat decadent?
YSL: This party?—oh, no, I think it's fresh to be on the boat because a boat evokes . . . evocation of *voyage*, of dreams.
Reporter: Opium dreams?
YSL: No.
Reporter: Were you worried about the drug connection?
YSL: No. It didn't cross my mind. Opium is dreams, but it is not considered like a drug. In China, to smoke opium, it was a fact of civilization.
Reporter: What is so great about this perfume?
YSL: I don't know. [He was later heard saying, "I didn't understand a thing I said."]

Something else that Saint Laurent apparently didn't know is that opium (the drug) was first brought to China during the early 1800s by the British East India Company in exchange for such commodities as tea and silk. According to *Foreign Mud*, a book on the subject by Maurice Collis, the East India Company "controlled the cultivation of opium in India, having in fact almost a world monopoly of the drug. . . . A decision was taken . . . to decrease home consumption and develop an export trade. . . . The Company therefore resolved to build up an export to China. . . . As its import was forbidden, it had to be smuggled in."

Guests could sit on one of the 750 beige down-filled pillows flung casually about (almost one per person) and be entertained by elaborately coiffed Chinese dancers in long white robes and red satin sashes who waved their fans in a slow, stately dance; followed by a sword dancer in a red silk costume, splendidly regaled, who twirled two swords. Several of the guests, who spend the better part of their lives at Studio 54, danced under spinning colored lights to music borrowed from Studio 54 on a floor covered with millions of tiny silver and gold paillettes.

Others preferred the bathrooms, which were filled with groups of people sniffing cocaine discreetly, while on deck couples lay on the pillows and stroked each other. Only one couple was seen actually copulating, the lady wearing a long slit skirt that seemed designed for the purpose, the gentleman in black tie. Rumors of celebrities gathering below deck for the same purposes, however,

Truman Capote, a connoisseur of extravagance, couldn't see anything decadent about "mature people having fun with their clothes on"

persisted. According to one person hired to work on the party, "That's where the cocaine *really* was."

There was enough lush food to satisfy even the most fastidious glutton. At one end of the disco deck was a giant seafood bar, dominated by an ice sculpture of a clam four feet high and two feet wide. Dozens of waiters dressed in black T-shirts and pants (YSL likes black) passed around silver trays of liquor and wicker trays of finger food. There were 160 pounds of steak and veal tartare; 13,000 oysters, clams and mussels; 9,000 tea sandwiches (including cucumber, YSL's favorite); 20 pounds of sturgeon and red caviar; 50 Peking ducks; 50 pints of strawberries; 2,500 miniature fruit tartlets; and a bushel each of crudités—snow peas, string beans, squash and cauliflower. There was enough liquor to drown in—some 7,200 drinks were served (eight for each guest), including 30 cases of Bollinger champagne (YSL's favorite) and 30 cases of Pinot Chardonnay (none of your déclassé American stuff).

At 10:30, to cap off the evening, $30,000 worth of French, Italian and Chinese fireworks by Zambelli (he did the Fourth of July in New York) were set off from two barges on the river, lighting up the World Trade Center and all of downtown Manhattan against the sky. There was also a report that people in Brooklyn thought they were being bombed. "It was a bit of overkill," said decorator Renny Reynolds.

But the night was still young. Armed with gilt cardboard passes, clutching their party favors—a tasseled Opium necklace and a copy of the Saint Laurent poem—and whatever else they had managed to stash away, the guests went on to Studio 54 for madder music and stronger drink and a champagne breakfast. At the après-party party, the theme was carried out in the form of an 18th-century antique opium bed inlaid with mother-of-pearl and marble, covered with hand-painted silk and satin pillows. A logo hung above—YSL in gold leaf—and tall hand-painted urns in ecclesiastical purples, magentas and reds stood about, filled with hundreds of calla lilies. Reynolds had wanted the opium bed on the ship, but Saint Laurent said no, it was too close to the idea of the drug—making a very fine distinction indeed.

The Seventh Avenue fashion czars, some of whom were launching their own perfumes this fall, were less than gracious in their appraisal of the party. As quoted in *Women's Wear Daily*, the eyeglass of the fashion industry:
Bill Blass: "It's very hard to judge a party as ambitious and big as that."
Oscar de la Renta: "It would have been the height of luxury if it had been a dinner for 40."
Mary McFadden (who thought the fireworks were "fantastic"): "There are two approaches with a party like that: Either you can create excitement or you can open a product elegantly, and they obviously took the first approach."
Halston: "It was just fabulous for that kind of party."
YSL: "The American designers were so nice to me."

The press coverage of this media extravaganza was as spectacular as the event, going far beyond Saint Laurent's wildest dreams. It was a blitz. Practically every paper in the country, from the Corsicana, Texas, *Sun* to the Irvine, California, *Daily Pilot*, ran something—a story or a picture. A particular favorite was a photo of Saint Laurent surrounded by his mannequins, all of them looking a little crazy. There were stories before, during and after the event, and interviews with Saint Laurent, who was widely quoted as saying, "When a woman loses her mystery, she is all finished forever. She has lost the most important thing she had." The Philadelphia *Bulletin* quoted Saint Laurent quoting Jean Cocteau, a great opium fan: "Opium is noble, the aristocratic drug." One enterprising reporter did a little extra research and discovered that the perfume was cheaper than the real thing; as of 30 September, the going price of heroin, which is derived from opium, was said to be $150 an ounce in Mexico and Asia.

Headline writers had a field day. "What's Saint Laurent Peddling Now? Opium," proclaimed a *People* magazine cover line. The Manfield, Ohio, *News-Journal* had "Mystery Cloaks Opium Perfume." The Philadelphia *Bulletin* came up with "'Opium' Pusher Sure Does Throw Luxurious Parties." Even *The Wall Street Journal* found the story irresistible: "Mafia launches big Opium

French Connection: Opium ad accompanied by a vial display

push—at about $100 an ounce—in Paris" was the lead of the 16-line item. "It could spread to New York in September."

What it all amounted to was free advertising. The press has been a collaborator, an arm of commerce, a role this piece, too, will inevitably play. The media have become prisoners of hype, a diseased condition into which they have sunk due to the economics of the business. Hype, in turn, has generated the need to expand coverage of gossip and trivia for an illiterate population caught up in celebrity fantasies.

The Charles of the Ritz people were particularly cynical in their use of the press. After the launch, an event designed for maximum publicity, when the clippings were in and they had what they wanted, they became very choosy about giving out stories. In a blitz, criticism tends to get lost. An individual story is harder to control. (*New Times* tried first to get an interview with Cathy Cash Spellman, who said she could not speak to us without the client's permission. Next we tried Kristina Wrba and Mark Laracy, both of whom stalled for the better part of two weeks, not answering phone calls. "Your type of magazine is completely different from a cosmetics magazine. It's political. Why do you want to do the story?" asked Wrba when we finally reached her. Laracy didn't like the magazine. "We like pablum journalism," he joked seriously.)

Suzy Knickerbocker of the New York *Daily News* called it "the party of the year" and proceeded to describe the mishaps: Lou Lou de la Falaise Klossowski tripped on a rug and fell; "young, blond Whitney Tower, Jr., the Whitney/Vanderbilt heir . . . stuck his black-trousered leg up to the calf into a bucket of water someone had inadvertently left on deck. . . . It was heaven," concluded Suzy.

In the Baton Rouge *Advocate*, Tom Teepen took the classic middle-class liberal view: "[Opium] is a giggle, a little risky but not very, because cops don't kick in the condominium doors of the rich and because, if you do go over the edge—you know, get hooked or something gauche—it's not much of a problem when you don't have to steal stereos or turn tricks in some john's car to pay for the miscalculation. . . . So dab on a little of Yves' Opium. And never mind that . . . somewhere people are dying mysterious and evocative deaths, their bodies culled down to papered skeletons. Never mind that a man is staring at prison walls in this first of the 20 years he will spend contemplating the walls' seductive beauty. That, wild and exotic, and trembling like a leaf trying to hold on into winter, a girl knows she must get ready again to give some stranger, who will despise her for it, what he can't get at home. Opium is only perfume, a lark, and so you don't have to think of such things. Really you don't, and Yves is so droll."

"It would have been the height of luxury if it had been a dinner for 40," said Oscar de la Renta

Why such a big launch when Opium was already a sellout before the party? All that exotica was not solely to glorify a new scent. Saint Laurent has never held the exalted position in fragrances that he does in couture. The launch was something of a ploy, to catapult him to the top of the fragrance heap. "The fact is," said the industry insider, "the investment was for all the right people—the fragrance buyers and fashion editors who transmitted the excitement to the public." And spending $300 per person for such coverage was not really very extravagant when one considers the usual course of a perfume launch.

Opium has been selling gorgeously in the stores. In Palm Springs, without the benefit of a single ad, it sold out in two days. At Bloomingdale's, Marvin Traub, chairman of the board, said the store had sold about $1,000 worth in the first hour. In the first week of sales, Opium averaged between $4,000 and $5,000 a day. All three of the New York stores that carry it—Saks, Bloomingdale's and Bendel's—featured Opium in their windows, the mannequins decked out with the tasseled necklace dangling from fingers, arms and necks. The necklace is a curved Chinese Red plastic pendant holding 1/8 ounce of perfume at $35. The flacon containing the perfume is modeled on the antique box in which opium was once shipped. *Women's Wear Daily* announced that the pendant "is currently THE necklace to wear in St. Tropez, Ibiza, Paris. . . ."

The demand has been further accelerated by clever marketing—the technique of exclusivity. Only two dozen accounts in the U.S. carry Opium, and the laws of supply and demand are operating with a vengeance. In exchange for the cachet of selling it, Kristina Wrba of Charles of the Ritz reportedly is demanding that downtown stores give six feet of counter space to Opium plus six feet for the other Saint Laurent brands; a certain fixturing of the counter; and a 50/50 split on advertising, mailings and catalogs. Buyers for stores outside the magic circle have been going to Paris and buying the stuff *retail* (positively unheard of), bringing it back and selling it without a profit, just so they can keep their customers supplied. And who says it's nonaddictive?

Exactly what are you getting for your $100 an ounce besides the aforementioned chemical components, which are worth approximately $5.00? A pipe dream of packaging and poetry. The artificiality of the jasmine (and possibly of other ingredients) should not astonish anyone. Very few perfumes contain natural essences anymore. There simply aren't enough flowers in Grasse, and synthetics are cheaper. Opium fanciers will be glad to know, however, that the packaging is very expensive. The container is hand made and the tassels are hand sewn.

Perhaps the ultimate accolade was delivered in November by hijackers who stole $60,000 worth of Opium from a delivery truck in New York. One assumes they knew exactly what they were getting. ●

Our recording tape is considered by most audiophiles to be the world's finest tape.
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CHAPPAQUIDDICK

FANTASYLAND: President Richard Nixon declares "I am not a crook" at a Disneyworld press conference.

GREAT MO DECAI

1969–1978 by Paul Slansky and Wendy Larsen

SPIRO AGNEW

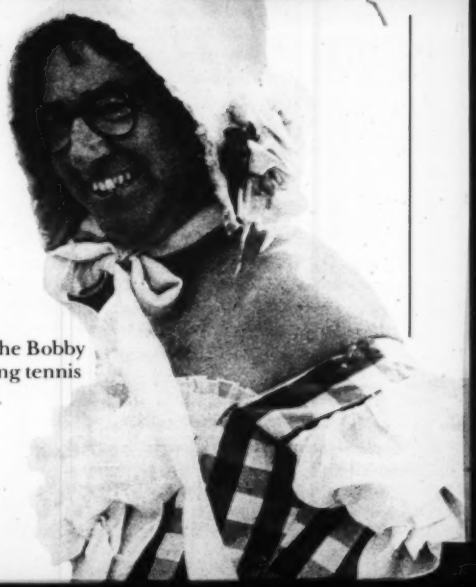
A FAST ONE: Fourteen-year-old James Gronen, winner of the 1973 Soap Box Derby, is stripped of his title for cheating.

THE MANSON FAMILY

TEXAS SCHOOL BOOK DEPOSITORY SOLD: Aubrey Mayhew charges admission to look out *the* window.

ALTAMONT

THE NEW MATH: Elementary school students now use calculators in class.



RACKET BALL: The Bobby Riggs/Billie Jean King tennis match.

I WILL FOLLOW HIM: Rennie Davis declares he would "crawl across the face of the earth to kiss the feet of the Perfect Master," the 16-year-old guru Maharaj Ji.

CELEBRITY SPORTS

TRADE OF THE DECADE: Yankee pitchers Fritz Petersen and Mike Kekich swap wives.

IT'S A LIVING: Three Apollo XV astronauts take hundreds of stamped envelopes to the moon, and later sell them to a stamp dealer in Germany.

OIL FOR THE DUCKS OF CALIFORNIA: An oil spill befouls 40 miles of Santa Barbara beaches.

CELEBRITY JOURNALISM: When *New Times* begins publishing in 1973, its Santa Barbara correspondent is Lance Loud.

IT'S ABOUT TIME: A restaurant catering exclusively to dogs opens in New York.

MENTS IN DENCE

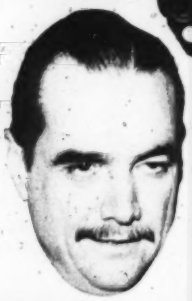
A PHILADELPHIA DONKEY IN KING ARTHUR'S COURT: *TV Guide* publisher Walter Annenberg is appointed to the Court of St. James.

KENT STATE

Photos: Tony Rollo/Newsweek; Valley Daily News © 1970; Central Press/Pictorial Parade; Globe Photos © 1973; Wide World; UPI (4)

CORNELIA BUGS GEORGE

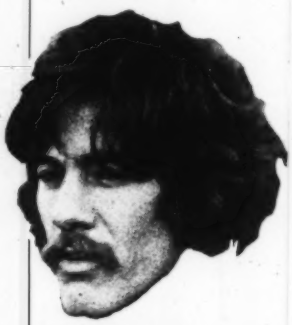
COUPLE OF THE DECADE: Larry Flynt and Ruth Carter Stapleton.



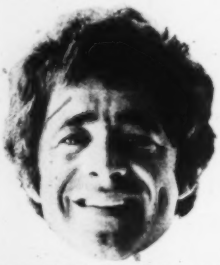
HENRY KISSINGER'S NOBEL PEACE PRIZE

THE RICH ARE VERY DIFFERENT: During his final days, Howard Hughes lets his toenails grow several inches and saves his urine in glass jars.

O CONGRESS: Wilbur Mills appears on stage in a Boston burlesque house as his girlfriend, stripper Fanne Foxe, finishes her act.



HAPPY NEWS: "Kill the Rona segment. Get rid of it. Give me air. You'll be able to hear the shots. I promise. You'll be able to hear the shots."—Geraldo Rivera to ABC at the execution of Gary Gilmore



UPCHUCK: Chuck Barris' game shows take the essence of S&M and strip it of all sex, leaving only humiliation.

SNUFF FILMS

BELIEVE IT OR NOT: At the end of 1974, ex-President Richard Nixon is voted the seventh Most Admired American.

FATHER OF INVENTION: Frank Zappa names his children Moon Unit, Dweezil and Ahmet Rodin.

SCRATCH 'N' SNIFF

AND THE LOBSTER WAS CHEWY: Craig Claiborne and a friend eat a $4,000 meal (31 dishes, 9 wines) at a Paris restaurant. "The presentation of the dishes was mundane," he reports.

HANOI BEATS YALE: Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker (class of 1916) establishes a Yale Club in Saigon and leads the singing of the Whiffenpoof song: "We are poor little lambs who have lost our way . . . baa, baa, baa."

FREE THE BERKOWITZ ONE: New York's Criminal Justice Agency recommends that David Berkowitz be released without bail on his own recognizance, since he has a permanent residence and a steady job.

GAMES PEOPLE PLAY: The object of the coin-operated electronic game Death Race is to run down as many "pedestrians" as possible.

DARK DAY: The cost of looting during the 1977 New York blackout is put at $150,000,000.

LAY, LADIES, LAY: MIT juniors Roxanne Ritchie (above) and Susan Gilbert rate the sexual prowess of 36 men on campus in the school newspaper.

EAT YOUR HEART OUT:
Diet pizza
Non-dairy creamer
Pringle's Potato Chips
Liquid protein diet

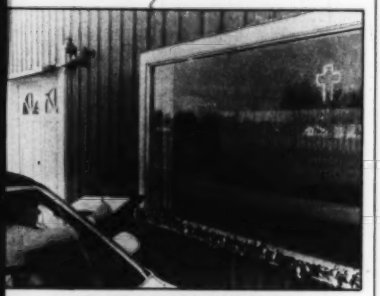
SCHOOL SPIRIT: A Florida high school football coach boosts his team's morale by biting off the heads of live frogs during pre-game huddles.

BO-RING!: Muhammad Ali fights Japanese wrestler Antonio Inoki, who spends most of the time lying on the canvas kicking at the champion's thighs.

Associate Editor Paul Slansky plans to start Nixon *magazine. Wendy Larsen is a poet.*

Photos: London Daily Express/Pictorial Parade; J.P. Laffont/Sygma; Nik Wheeler/Black Star; Dirck Halstead/Pledge; Martin A. Levick/Black Star; Barbara Malarek © 1976; Wide World (10); UPI (5)

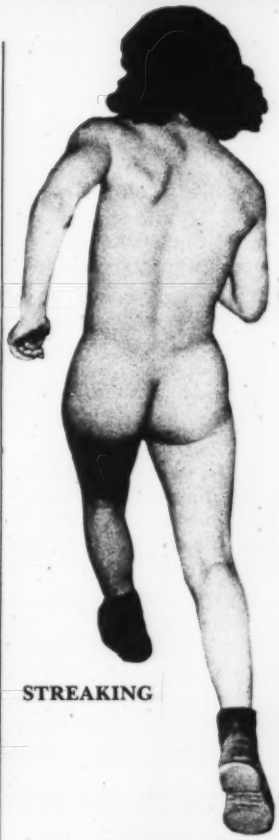
BLOOD HYPE: Members of Kiss add drops of their own blood to the red ink used in their first comic book.



LAST RESPECTS: A drive-in funeral parlor opens in New Roads, Louisiana.

A SIGN OF THE TIMES

27-MINUTE GAP: When the sound is lost on the first Ford/Carter debate, neither man moves from his podium or acknowledges his opponent during the delay.



STREAKING

DAY OF THE SERPENT: On September 8, 1974, a few hours after Gerald Ford pardons Richard Nixon, Evel Knievel rides his motorcycle into the Snake River Canyon.

FLYNT SKIN: *Hustler* runs color photos of Larry Flynt's gunshot wounds.

SENSURROUND

CBs

THE PET ROCK

ASTROTURF

THE SQUARE TOMATO

BILLY BEER

THE BUYCENTENNIAL

SLEAZE PRINCE: Tony Orlando retires from show business in grief over the death of Freddie Prinze. He unretires four months later.

CHURCH AND STATE: Pallottine Father Guido Carcich uses money collected for the Pallottine missions to help finance Maryland Governor Marvin Mandel's divorce.

THE *NEW YORK TIMES* LIVING SECTION

DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOUR CHILDREN ARE? The body of a newborn baby is found under a bed at Miss Porter's School for Girls in Farmington, Connecticut.

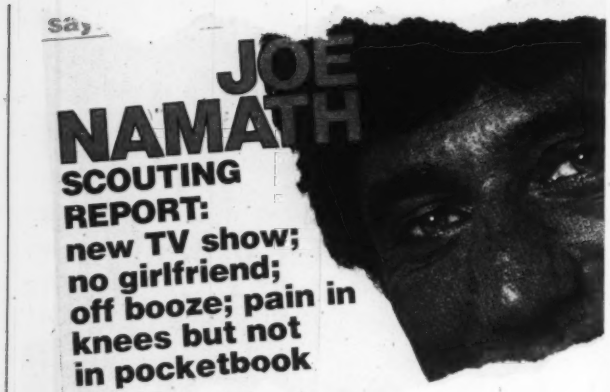
GREAT MOMENT IN THE AMERICAN EX-PRESIDENCY: Gerald Ford endorses a series of coins for the Franklin Mint for an undisclosed fee.

THE *MAYAGUEZ*

THE FRIDAY NIGHT MOVIE: The SLA shoot-out is televised live.

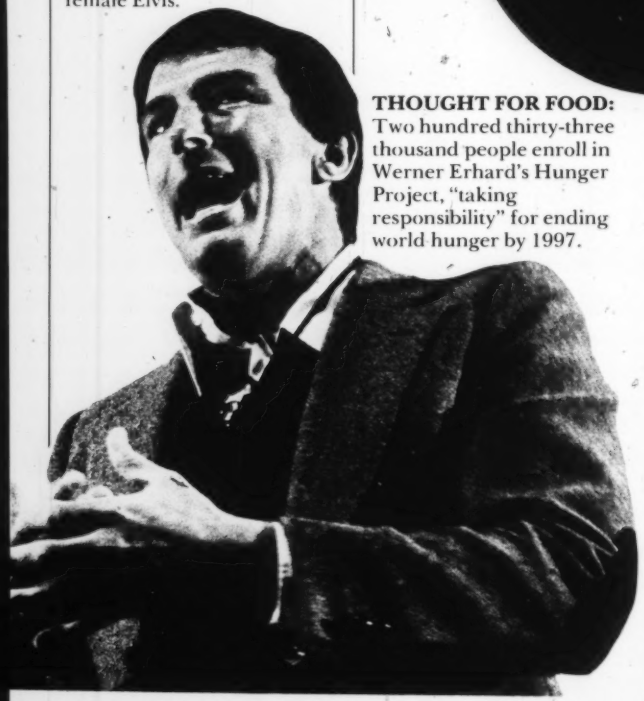
"CLEAVERS": Eldridge Cleaver introduces a line of men's pants with an "appurtenance" at the crotch.

IF LINCOLN WERE ALIVE TODAY HE'D BE SPINNING IN HIS GRAVE: Jack Ford and Bianca Jagger are photographed in the Lincoln Room of the White House.



ANY *PEOPLE* COVER LINES

ROCK 'N' ROLL HEAVEN: A rock group undergoes plastic surgery to look like Jim Morrison, Janis Joplin, Jim Croce, and a male and female Elvis.



THOUGHT FOR FOOD: Two hundred thirty-three thousand people enroll in Werner Erhard's Hunger Project, "taking responsibility" for ending world hunger by 1997.

MAD MONEY: Neiman-Marcus' Christmas catalog for 1978 offers "his" and "hers" bank vaults in a Utah mountain ($90,000 for a 50-year lease) and an all-chocolate Monopoly set ($600). The Sakowitz catalog features, for $50,000, a filmed documentary of your life.

WHAT BECOMES A LEGEND MOST? Yankee fans show up at 1978 home games wearing "Boston Sucks" T-shirts.

BAD TASTE? A scene in NBC's *Holocaust*, in which Nazi victims are told that the gas chambers are merely disinfecting areas, is followed by a commercial for Lysol.

YES, *THE NEW YORKER:* In January 1978, the Universal Product Code appears on newsstand editions of *The New Yorker*.

THE SIGHT OF MUSIC: Picture disks provide lousy sound at higher prices.

THE SKY IS FALLING: A 50-pound block of frozen human waste falls from an airplane and crashes through the roof of a Denver home.

WINDOW DRESSING: John E. Gallagher, Jr., president of the Cleveland Board of Education, is fined $100 for mooning his brother on an interstate highway.

NOW *THAT'S* STRICT: A San Jose man shoots his six-year-old son dead when the child refuses to give him a dollar.

NEXT, A SUPERDOME BRISS? A Florida lawyer holds his son's bar mitzvah in the Orange Bowl.

HANDICAPPED CHIC: A Beverly Hills shop advertises 14-karat gold eyepatches.

PAPER MOON: The Moonies put out New York's best strike newspaper.

SILENT MAJORITY: The number of eligible American voters who actually go to the polls is down to 34 percent.

BE PREPARED: Seventeen members of New Orleans Boy Scout Troop 137 are procured by their scoutmasters for "aggravated crimes against nature."

NOTHING BUT THE DEAD AND DYING BACK IN MY LITTLE TOWN: The whole town's talking about the Jones boy.

Photos: Martin A. Levick/Black Star (2); Wide World; UPI

Fill out this coupon and save the children

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Tell us how you want to help, by answering these questions:

1. What kind of child would you like to help?

☐ Boy ☐ Girl ☐ No preference

2. What geographical area are you interested in?

Urgent need exists in all the areas listed below, especially overseas. If you have a strong preference for a particular location, check the area of your choice. If not, won't you please let us assign a child where the need is greatest?

☐ **Certainly. Choose a child for me in an area of greatest need.**

I strongly prefer:

☐ Appalachia (U.S.)
☐ Bangladesh
☐ Chicano (U.S.)
☐ Colombia
☐ Dominican Republic
☐ Honduras
☐ Indian (Latin America)
☐ Indian (U.S.)
☐ Indonesia
☐ Inner Cities (U.S.)
☐ Israel
☐ Korea
☐ Lebanon
☐ Mexico
☐ Rural South (U.S.)
☐ Upper Volta

3. Would you like a picture of your sponsored child?

Shortly after we select a child for you, we can send you a photograph and brief personal history, if you desire.

☐ Yes ☐ No

4. Would you like to exchange correspondence?

If desired, correspondence can build a meaningful one-to-one relationship and provide a unique educational experience for the sponsored child. In areas where illiteracy is high, a village representative will keep you informed of the progress your child is making. Translations, where necessary, are supplied by Save the Children.

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5. Would you like information about the child's community?

Several times a year you can receive detailed reports on the activities and projects being undertaken in the community to benefit your sponsored child. These community reports show how your money is being used most effectively for permanent improvements to the child's environment—for health care, education, food production, nutrition, and community training. Would you like to receive such information?

☐ Yes ☐ No

6. How do you wish to send your sponsorship contribution?

Enclosed is my check for $_____ .

☐ Monthly, $16 ☐ Semi-annually, $96
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7. Do you wish verification of Save the Children credentials?

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(A complete audit statement is available upon request.)

8. Would you rather make a contribution than become a sponsor of an individual child at this time?

☐ Yes, enclosed is my contribution of $_____.

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photo: Bentley Kassal

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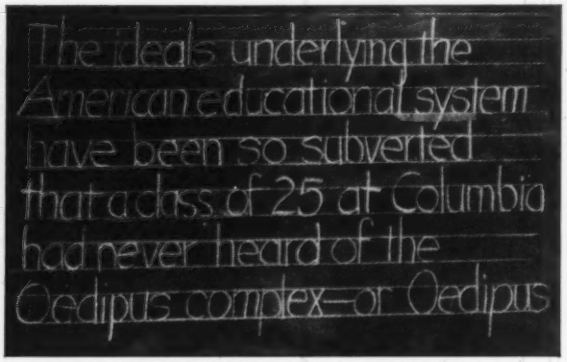
The New Illiteracy

by Christopher Lasch


The ideals underlying the
American educational system
have been so subverted
that a class of 25 at Columbia
had never heard of the
Oedipus complex—or Oedipus

The extension of formal schooling to groups formerly excluded from it is one of the most striking developments in modern history. The experience of Western Europe and the United States in the last 200 years suggests that mass education provides one of the principal foundations of economic development, and modernizers throughout the rest of the world have tried to duplicate the achievement of the West in bringing education to the masses. Faith in the wonder-working powers of education has proven to be one of the most durable components of liberal ideology, easily assimilated by ideologies hostile to the rest of liberalism. Yet the democratization of education has accomplished little to justify this faith.

Conservative and radical critics of the education system agree on a central contention—that intellectual standards are inherently elitist. Radicals attack the school system on the grounds that it perpetuates an obsolescent literary culture, the "linear" culture of the written word, and imposes it on the masses. Efforts to uphold standards of literary expression and logical coherence, according to this view, serve only to keep the masses in their place. Educational radicalism unwittingly echoes the conservatism that assumes that common people cannot hope to master the art of reasoning or achieve clarity of expression, and that forcibly exposing them to high culture ends, inevitably, in abandonment of academic rigor.

Forced to choose between these positions, those who believe in critical thought as an indispensable precondition of social or political progress might well renounce the very possibility of progress and side with the conservatives, who at least recognize intellectual deterioration when they see it and do not attempt to disguise it as liberation. But the conservative interpretation of the collapse of standards is much too simple. Standards are deteriorating even at Harvard, Yale and Princeton. A faculty committee at Harvard reports, "The Harvard faculty does not care about teaching." According to a study of general education at Columbia, teachers have lost "their common sense of what kind of ignorance is unacceptable." As a result, "Students reading Rabelais's description of civil disturbances ascribe them to the French Revolution. A class of twenty-five had never heard of the Oedipus complex—or of Oedipus. Only one student in a class of fifteen could date the Russian Revolution within a decade."

Mass education, which began as a promising attempt to democratize the higher culture of the privileged classes, has ended by stupefying the privileged themselves. Modern society has achieved unprecedented rates of formal literacy, but at the same time it has produced new forms of illiteracy.

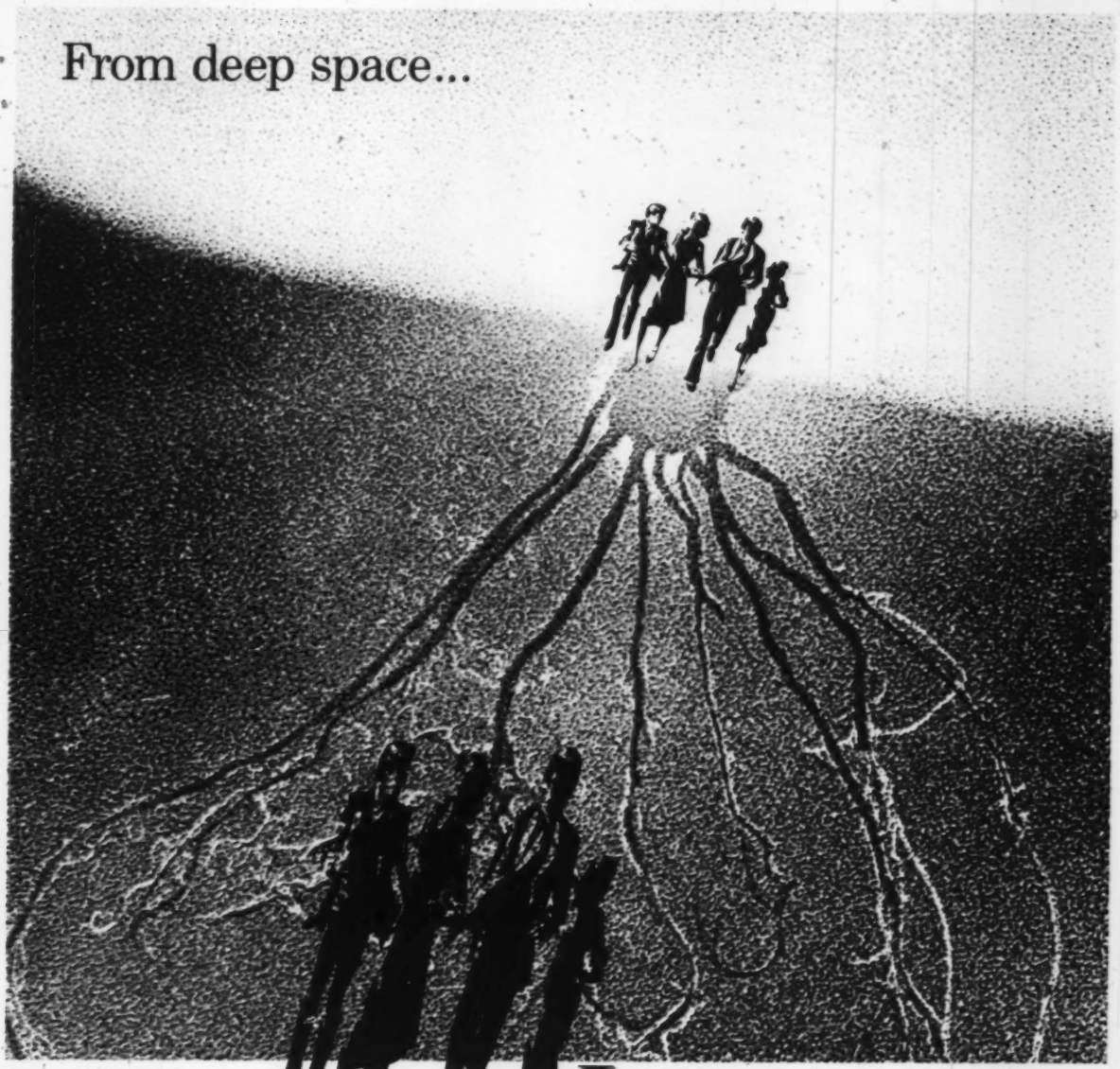
In 1966, high school seniors scored an average of 467 points on the verbal section of the Scholastic Aptitude Test—hardly cause for celebration. Ten years later they scored only 429. Scores on the mathematical part of the test dropped from an average of 495 to 470. Many publishers have simplified textbooks in response to complaints that a new generation of students, raised on television, movies and what one educator calls "the antilanguage assumptions of our culture"finds existing textbooks unintelligible. The decline of intellectual competence cannot be accounted for, as some observers would have it, on the reactionary assumption that more students from minority and low-income groups are taking tests, going to college, and thus dragging down the scores. The proportion of these students has remained unchanged over the last ten years; meanwhile the decline of academic achievement has extended to elite schools as well as to community colleges, junior colleges and public high schools. Every year, 40 to 60 percent of the students at the University of California find themselves required to enroll in remedial English. At Stanford, only a quarter of the students in the class entering in 1975 managed to pass the university's English placement test, even though these students had achieved high scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test. At private high schools, average test scores in math and English dropped by eight and ten points in a single year, between 1974 and 1975.

Even at the top schools in the country, students' ability to use their own language, their knowledge of foreign languages, their reasoning powers, their stock of historical information and their knowledge of the major literary classics have all undergone a relentless process of deterioration.

This article is excerpted from The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations, *by Christopher Lasch, Professor of History at the University of Rochester. The book will be published in January.* *Copyright © 1979 W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.*

Photograph by Steve Phillips

From deep space...



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Nor is this functional illiteracy confined to freshmen and sophomores. Scores on the Graduate Record Examination have also declined.

In view of all this evidence, it should not surprise us that Americans are becoming increasingly ignorant about their own rights as citizens. According to a recent survey 47 percent of a sample of 17-year-olds, on the verge of becoming eligible voters, did not know the simple fact that each state elects two United States senators. More than half of the 17-year-olds and more than three-fourths of the 13-year-olds in the survey could not explain the significance of the Fifth Amendment protection against self-incrimination. One of every eight 17-year-olds believed that the President does not have to obey the law, and one of every two students at both ages believed that the President appoints members of Congress. Half the 13-year-olds thought that the law forbids anyone to start a new political party. Hardly any of the students in either group could explain what steps the Constitution entitles Congress to take in order to stop a President from fighting a war without Congressional approval. If an educated electorate is the best defense against arbitrary government, the survival of political freedom appears uncertain at best. Large numbers of Americans now believe that the Constitution sanctions arbitrary executive power, and recent political history, with its steady growth of presidential power, can only have reinforced such an assumption. What has become of the early republican dream?

Modern society has achieved unprecedented rates of formal literacy; at the same time it has produced new forms of illiteracy.

The common school system grew out of the democratic revolution, which created a new type of citizenship based on equality before the law and limited government—a "government of laws, not men." The model citizen of early republican theory knew what his rights were and defended them from infringement by his fellow citizens and by the state. He could not be fooled by demagogues or overawed by the learned obfuscations of professional wise men. Appeals to authority left him unimpressed. Always on the alert for forgery, he had, moreover, enough worldly wisdom about men's motives, understanding of the principles of critical reasoning and skill in the use of language to detect intellectual fraud in whatever form it presented itself.

Training such exemplary citizens obviously required a new system of education—though far more important, in the minds of early republican theorists, was the consideration that it presupposed a nation of small-property holders and a fairly equal distribution of wealth. Republican education had as its object, in Jefferson's words, "to diffuse knowledge more generally through the mass of the people." It stressed what the 18th century would have called useful knowledge, especially ancient and modern history, which Jefferson hoped might teach the young to judge "the actions and designs of men, to know ambition under every disguise it may assume; and knowing it, to defeat its views."

Beginning with the Irish in the 1840s, the immigration of politically backward elements, as they were commonly regarded, sharpened the fear, already an undercurrent in American social thought, that the United States would regress to a hated old-world pattern of class conflict, hereditary poverty and political despotism. In the climate of such anxieties, educational reformers like Horace Mann and Henry Barnard won a hearing for proposals to set up a national system of compulsory education and to broaden the curriculum beyond the purely intellectual training envisioned by earlier reformers. From this time on, the problem of acculturating the immigrant population never wandered far from the center of the American educational enterprise. Because the task of initiation presented itself in this form, the American school, in contrast to the European, placed heavy emphasis on the nonacademic side of the curriculum. The democratic aim of bringing the fruits of modern culture to the masses gave way in practice to a concern with education as a form of social control. Even in the 1830s, the common school already commended itself, in part, as a means of subtly discouraging the masses from aspiring to "culture."

The differences between American and European systems of public education should not be exaggerated. Both systems from the beginning combined democratic and undemocratic features; as the political objective of public education gave way to a growing preoccupation with industrial objectives, the undemocratic features became more and more pronounced.

At first, 19th-century students of society saw a close connection between political and economic "initiation." They conceived of industrial training as an extension of the training required for republican citizenship. The same habits of mind that made good citizens—self-reliance, self-respect, versatility—appeared to be essential to good workmanship. By bringing modern culture to the masses, the school system would also inculcate industrial discipline in the broadest sense of the term. What industrial discipline meant to an earlier and now almost extinct democratic tradition was best expressed by one of its last exponents, Veblen, who believed that modern industry nourished in the producing classes "iconoclastic" habits of mind—skepticism, a critical attitude toward authority and tradition, a "materialistic" and scientific outlook and a development of the "instinct of workmanship" beyond anything possible in earlier forms of society.

During the period around the turn of the century—the same period in which "Americanization" became the semiofficial slogan of American educators—a second and much cruder form of industrial education, stressing manual training and vocational education, crept into the public schools under the watchword of "efficiency." George Eastman, after complaining that black people were "densely ignorant," concluded that "the only hope of the Negro race and the settlement of this problem is through proper education of the Hampton-Tuskegee type, which is directed almost wholly toward making them useful citizens through education on industrial lines." In 1908, a group of businessmen urged the National Education Association to introduce more courses in commercial and industrial subjects into the elementary curriculum. Seventy percent of the pupils in elementary schools, they pointed out, never went on to high school, and the best training for these students was "utilitarian first, and cultural afterward."

Every year, 40 to 60 percent of the students at the University of California find themselves required to enroll in remedial English.

In response to a public outcry about the high rate of academic failure in the schools, an outcry that swelled to a cho-

rus around 1910, educators introduced systems of testing and tracking that had the effect of relegating academic "failures" to programs of manual and industrial training (where many of them continued to fail). Protests against genteel culture, overemphasis on academic subjects, "gentleman's education" and the "cultured ease in the classroom, of drawing room quiet and refinement" frequently coincided with an insistence that higher education and "culture" should not in any case be "desired by the mob." The progressive period thus saw the full flowering of the school as a major agency of industrial recruitment, selection and certification.

Institutions of cultural transmission, which might have been expected to counter the narcissistic trend of our culture, have instead been shaped in its image.

Down into the thirties and forties, those groups with a cultural tradition that valued formal learning, notably the Jews, managed to make use of the system, even a system increasingly geared to the purpose of industrial recruitment, as a lever of collective self-advancement. Under favorable conditions, the school's emphasis on "Americanism" and its promotion of universal norms had a liberating effect, helping individuals to make a fruitful break with parochial ethnic traditions. When Randolph Bourne (a favorite of radical historians, who believe his critique of education anticipates their own) extolled cultural pluralism, he had in mind as a model not the intact immigrant cultures of the ghettos but the culture of the twice-uprooted immigrant intellectuals he met at Columbia.

The reforms of the progressive period gave rise to an unimaginative educational bureaucracy and a system of industrial recruitment that eventually undermined the ability of the school to serve as an agency of intellectual emancipation; but it was a long time before the bad effects of these changes became pervasive. As educators convinced themselves, with the help of intelligence tests, that most of the students could never master an academic curriculum, they found it necessary to devise other ways of keeping them busy. The introduction of courses in homemaking, health, citizenship and other nonacademic subjects, together with the proliferation of athletic programs and extracurricular activities, reflected the dogma that schools had to educate the "whole child"; but it also reflected the practical need to fill up the students' time and to keep them reasonably contented.

Educational reformers brought the family's work into the school in the hope of making the school an instrument not merely of education but of socialization as well. Dimly recognizing that in many areas—precisely those that lie outside the formal curriculum—experience teaches more than books, educators then proceeded to do away with books: to import experience into the academic setting, to re-create the modes of learning formerly associated with the family, to encourage students to "learn by doing." Having imposed a deadening academic curriculum on every phase of the child's experience, they demanded, too late, that education be brought into contact with "life."

In practice, this advice dictated a continuing search for undemanding programs of study. The search reached new heights in the forties, when the educational establishment introduced another in a series of panaceas—education for "life adjustment." In Illinois, proponents of life adjustment urged schools to give more attention to such "problems of high school youth" as "improving one's personal appearance," "selecting a family dentist" and "developing and maintaining wholesome boy-girl relationships." Elsewhere, observers reported hearing classroom discussions on such topics as "How can I be popular?" "Why are my parents so strict?" "Should I follow my crowd or obey my parents' wishes?"

Given the underlying American commitment to the integral high school—the refusal to specialize college preparation and technical training in separate institutions—make-work programs, athletics, extracurricular activities and the pervasive student emphasis on sociability corrupted not merely the vocational and life-adjustment programs but the college preparatory course as well. The concept of industrial discipline deteriorated to the point where intellectual and even manual training became incidental to the inculcation of orderly habits. The more closely education approximated this empty ideal, however, the more effectively it discouraged ambition of any sort, except perhaps the ambition to get away from school by one expedient or another.

By the fifties, two groups of critics emerged. The first, led by Arthur Bestor, Albert Lynd, Mortimer Smith and the Council for Basic Education, denied that the school should socialize the "whole child," assume the functions of the family and the church or serve as an agency of industrial recruitment. They argued that the school's only responsibility was to provide basic intellectual training and to extend this training to everyone. They deplored anti-intellectualism but also condemned the tracking system.

A second group of critics—reformers like Vannevar Bush, James B. Conant and Vice Admiral Hyman G. Rickover—attacked American education not because it was both anti-intellectual and undemocratic but because it failed to turn out enough scientists and high-level technicians. After the Russians launched a space capsule in 1957, this kind of criticism forced educators to institute new methods of training in science and mathematics, which stressed assimilation of basic concepts rather than memorization of facts. Although they called for a return to basics, they did not question the school's function as an instrument of military and industrial recruitment; they merely sought to make the selection process more efficient.

Under the Selective Service Act of 1951, passed at the height of the Korean War, military service became a universal obligation except for those who managed to qualify for academic exemption. The system of academic deferment,

The student movement embodied a militant anti-intellectualism of its own, which corrupted and eventually absorbed it.

when combined with educational reforms designed to recruit a scientific and technical elite, created a national system of manpower selection in which minorities and the poor provided recruits for a vast peacetime army, while the middle class, eager to escape military service, attended college in unprecedented numbers.

The National Defense Education Act of 1958, designed to speed up production of engineers and scientists, gave added impetus to the boom in higher education, which lasted until the early 1970s. Meanwhile, the schools devoted increasing attention to the identification of able students and the discouragement of others. More efficient systems of

tracking, together with increased emphasis on math and science, recruited growing numbers of college students but did little to improve their training. Efforts to extend techniques first perfected by teachers of the "new math" into the social sciences and humanities produced students deficient in factual knowledge and intolerant of instruction that did not address their need for "creativity" and "self-expression."

Institutions of cultural transmission (school, church, family), which might have been expected to counter the narcissistic trend of our culture, have instead been shaped in its image, while a growing body of progressive theory justifies this capitulation on the ground that such institutions best serve society when they provide a mirror reflection of it.

In the sixties, spokesmen for the civil rights movement and later for black power attacked the gross injustice of the educational system. The disparity in the academic performance of black and white schoolchildren dramatized the failure of American education more clearly than any other issue. Precisely for this reason, educators had always attempted to explain it away either on the grounds of racial inferiority or, when racism became scientifically unacceptable, on the grounds of "cultural deprivation." As Kenneth B. Clark pointed out, "Social scientists and educators, in the use and practice of the concept of cultural deprivation, have unintentionally provided an educational establishment that was already resistant to change . . . with a justification for continued inefficiency, much more respectable and much more acceptable in the middle of the twentieth century than racism."

The struggle over desegregation brought to the surface the inherent contradiction between the American commitment to universal education on the one hand and the realities of a class society on the other.

Conflicts over educational policy in the fifties had made it clear that the country faced a choice between basic education for all and a complicated educational bureaucracy that functioned as an agency of manpower selection. The same issue, often clouded by overheated rhetoric, underlay the more bitter struggles of the sixties and seventies. For black people, especially for upwardly mobile blacks in whom the passion for education burns as brightly as it ever did in descendants of the Puritans or in Jewish immigrants, desegregation represented the promise of equal education in the basic subjects indispensable to economic survival, even in an otherwise illiterate modern society: reading, writing and arithmetic. Black parents, it would seem, clung to what seems today an old-fashioned—from the point of view of educational "innovators," a hopelessly reactionary—conception of education.

Thoroughly middle-class in its ideological derivation, the movement for equal education nevertheless embodied demands that could not be met without a radical overhaul of the entire educational system—and of much else besides. It flew in the face of long-established educational practice. It contained implications unpalatable not merely to entrenched educational bureaucrats but to progressives, who believed that education had to be tailored to the "needs" of the young, that overemphasis on academic subjects inhibited "creativity" and that too much stress on academic competition encouraged individualism at the expense of cooperation. The attempt to revive basic education, on the part of blacks and other minorities, cut across the grain of educational experimentation—the open classroom, the school without walls, the attempt to promote spontaneity and to undermine the authoritarianism allegedly rampant in the classroom.

In the late sixties, as the civil rights movement gave way to the movement for black power, radicals in the educational world began to identify themselves with a new theory of black culture, an inverted version of the theory of cultural deprivation, which upheld the ghetto subculture as a functional adaptation to ghetto life, indeed as an attractive alternative to the white middle-class culture of competitive achievement. Radicals now criticized the school for imposing white culture on the poor. Black-power spokesmen, eager to exploit white-liberal guilt, joined the attack, demanding separate programs of black studies, an end to the tyranny of the written word, instruction in English as a second language.

The educational radicalism of the late sixties, for all its revolutionary militance, left the status quo intact and even reinforced it. In default of radical criticism, it remained for moderates like Kenneth Clark to make the genuinely radical point that "black children or any other group of children can't develop pride by just saying they have it, by singing a song about it, or by saying I'm black and beautiful or I'm white and superior." Racial pride, Clark insisted, comes from "demonstrable achievement." Against the "self-righteous, positive sentimentalism" of school reformers like Jonathan Kozol and Herbert Kohl, veterans of the civil rights movement argued that teachers do not need to love their students as long as they demand good work from them. In upholding standards and asking everybody to meet them, teachers convey more respect for their students, according to these spokesmen for the much maligned Negro middle class, than they convey when they patronize the culture of the ghetto and seek, as Hylan Lewis put it, to "gild a noisome lily."

At a high school "without walls" in New Orleans, a student can receive English credits for working as a disc jockey at a radio station

The whole problem of American education comes down to this: In American society, almost everyone identifies intellectual excellence with elitism. This attitude not only guarantees the monopolization of educational advantages by the few; it lowers the quality of elite education itself and threatens to bring about a reign of universal ignorance.

Recent developments in higher education have progressively diluted its content and reproduced, at a higher level, the conditions that prevail in the public schools. The collapse of general education; the abolition of any serious effort to instruct students in foreign languages; the introduction of many programs in black studies, women's studies and other forms of consciousness raising for no other purpose than to head off political discontent; the ubiquitous inflation of grades—all have lowered the value of a university education at the same time that rising tuitions place it beyond reach of all but the affluent.

What precipitated the crisis of the sixties was not simply the pressure of unprecedented numbers of students (many of whom would gladly have spent their youth elsewhere) but a fatal conjuncture of historical changes: the emergence of a new social conscience among students activated by the moral rhetoric of the New Frontier and by the civil rights movement, and the simultaneous collapse of the university's claims to moral and intellectual legitimacy. Instead of offering a rounded program of humane learning, the university now frankly served as a cafeteria from which students had to select so many "credits." Instead of diffusing peace and enlightenment, it allied itself with the war ma-

chine. Eventually, even its claim to provide better jobs became suspect.

At the same time, the student movement embodied a militant anti-intellectualism of its own, which corrupted and eventually absorbed it. Demand for the abolition of grades, although defended on grounds of high pedagogical principle, turned out in practice—as revealed by experiments with ungraded courses and pass-fail options—to reflect a desire for less work and a wish to avoid judgment on its quality. The demand for more "relevant" courses often boiled down to a desire for an intellectually undemanding curriculum, in which students could win academic credits for political activism, self-expression, transcendental meditation, encounter therapy and the study and practice of witchcraft. Even when seriously advanced in opposition to sterile academic pedantry, the slogan of relevance embodied an underlying antagonism to education itself—an inability to take an interest in anything beyond immediate experience.

The university remains a diffuse, shapeless and permissive institution that has absorbed the major currents of cultural modernism and reduced them to a watery blend...

In the seventies, the most common criticism of higher education revolves around the charge of cultural elitism. Two contributors to a Carnegie Commission report on education condemn the idea that "there are certain works that should be familiar to all educated men" as inherently an "elitist notion." The Carnegie Commission contributors argue that since the United States is a pluralist society, "adherence exclusively to the doctrines of any one school... would cause higher education to be in great dissonance with society."

Given the prevalence of these attitudes among teachers and educators, it is not surprising that students at all levels of the educational system have so little knowledge of the classics of world literature. At a high school "without walls" in New Orleans, students can receive English credits for working as a disc jockey at a radio station and reading *How to Become a Radio Disc Jockey* and *Radio Programming in Action*. In San Marino, California, the high school English department increased its enrollments by offering electives in "Great American Love Stories," "Myths and Folklore," "Science Fiction" and "The Human Condition."

Those who teach college students today see at first hand the effect of these practices, not merely in the students' reduced ability to read and write but in the diminished store of their knowledge about the cultural traditions they are supposed to inherit. With the collapse of religion, biblical references, which formerly penetrated deep into everyday awareness, have become incomprehensible, and the same thing is now happening to the literature and mythology of antiquity—indeed, to the entire literary tradition of the West, which has always drawn so heavily on biblical and classical sources. In the space of two or three generations, enormous stretches of the "Judaeo-Christian tradition," so often invoked by educators but so seldom taught in any form, have passed into oblivion. The effective loss of cultural traditions on such a scale makes talk of a new Dark Age far from frivolous. Yet this loss coincides with an information glut, with the recovery of the past by specialists and with an unprecedented explosion of knowledge—none of which, however, impinges on everyday experience or shapes popular culture.

The resulting split between general knowledge and the specialized knowledge of the experts, embedded in obscure journals and written in language or mathematical symbols unintelligible to the layman, has given rise to a growing body of criticism and exhortation. The ideal of general education in the university, however, has suffered the same fate as basic education in the lower schools. Even those college teachers who praise general education in theory find that its practice drains energy from their specialized research and thus interferes with academic advancement. Administrators have little use for general education, since it does not attract foundation grants and large-scale government support. Students object to the reintroduction of requirements in general education because the work demands too much of them and seldom leads to lucrative employment.

Under these conditions, the university remains a diffuse, shapeless and permissive institution that has absorbed the major currents of cultural modernism and reduced them to a watery blend, a mind-emptying ideology of cultural revolution, personal fulfillment and creative alienation. Donald Barthelme's parody of higher learning in *Snow White*—like all parody in an age of absurdities—so closely resembles reality as to become unrecognizable as parody.

Beaver College is where she got her education. She studied *Modern Woman, Her Privileges and Responsibilities*: the nature and nurture of women and what they stand for, in evolution and in history, including household, upbringing, peacekeeping, healing and devotion, and how these contribute to the rehumanizing of today's world. Then she studied *Classical Guitar I*, utilizing the methods and techniques of Sor, Tarrega, Segovia, etc. Then she studied *English Romantic Poets II*: Shelley, Byron, Keats. Then she studied *Theoretical Foundations of Psychology*: mind, consciousness, unconscious mind, personality, the self, interpersonal relations, psychosexual norms, social games, groups, adjustment, conflict, authority, individuation, integration and mental health. Then she studied *Oil Painting I*, bringing to the first class, as instructed, Cadmium Yellow Light, Cadmium Yellow Medium, Cadmium Red Light, Alizarine Crimson, Ultramarine Blue, Cobalt Blue, Viridian, Ivory Black, Raw Umber, Yellow Ochre, Burnt Sienna, White. Then she studied *Personal Resources I and II*: self-evaluation, developing the courage to respond to the environment, opening and using the mind, individual experience, training, the use of time, mature redefinition of goals, action projects. Then she studied *Realism and Idealism in the Contemporary Italian Novel*: Palazzeschi, Brancati, Bilenchi, Pratolini, Moravia, Pavese, Levi, Silone, Berto, Cassola, Ginzburg, Malaparte, Calvino, Gadda, Bassani, Landolfi. Then she studied—

A latter-day Madame Bovary, Snow White is a typical victim of mass culture, the culture of commodities and consumerism with its suggestive message that experiences formerly reserved for those of high birth, deep understanding or much practical acquaintance of life can be enjoyed by all without effort, on purchase of the appropriate commodity. Snow White's education is itself a commodity, the consumption of which promises to "fulfill her creative potential," in the jargon of pseudo-emancipation.

Snow White's instructors assume that higher learning ideally includes everything, assimilates all of life. And it is true that no aspect of contemporary thought has proved immune to educationalization. The university has boiled all experience down into "courses" of study—a culinary image appropriate to the underlying ideal of enlightened consumption. ●

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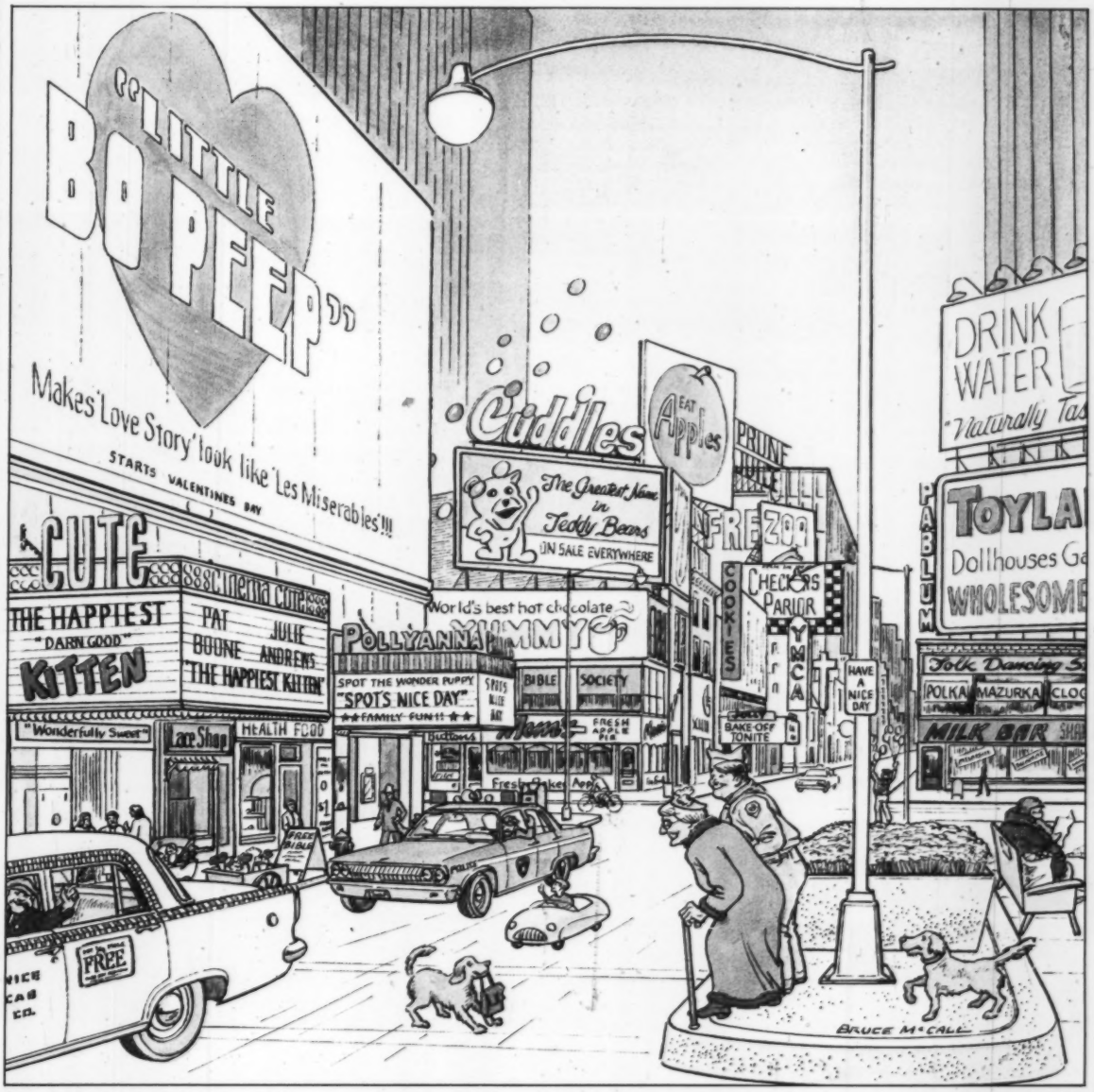
The Day They Finally Cleaned Up Times Square

by Bruce McCall



It all began when Bloomingdale's put out that lingerie brochure with the models dressed up like bag ladies. Well, *thinking* New York thought this was going too far. Were even those tatterdemalion creatures now fair game? Before you knew it, Geraldo Rivera went on TV and started his fund to install those molded plastic benches just for the bag ladies of Broadway. Then the Mayor came over for the official ceremonies. And of course Bess, and Marion Javits. And George Plimpton got his gang to buy up some leases. It wasn't one of those dreary "born again" things, it was real and it was earnest and it came from *here*. And it just mushroomed, is all.

WINDEX REX

When the hottest tickets in town became two-on-the-checkout-aisle

by Tracy Young

Photograph by Neil Selkirk

décadence

Something is happening here. Something wonderful, something truly awful. A small crowd huddles, its collective breath creating ragged circles of steam on the window. Three women in evening gowns and three men in midnight blue tuxedos, all in various phases of *déshabillé*, are seated around a large dinner table. A liveried servant is pouring wine right onto the damask tablecloth. Silverware is scattered, plates upturned. An unidentifiable *au gratin* is smeared across one of the women's bare shoulders. Torn bits of bibb lettuce dangle from a (fake) chandelier. The wine stain seems to be spreading.

"These people are *playing* with their food!" a plumpish middle-aged woman gasps.

Another woman, carrying a handbag on which is inscribed the entire alphabet in lower-case letters, moves closer. She removes her sunglasses and wipes them on her sleeve.

This whole denouement is taking place among mannequins in the window of D'Agostino's on 56th Street and First Avenue, Manhattan.

D'Agostino's is a classy supermarket, but the neighborhood is lousy with classy supermarkets—Gristede's, Sloan's, Fred & Heinz Delicatessen—except that none of them has such terrific windows.

The windows at D'Agostino's are the creation of Manuel Vargas, 27, a trim, soft-spoken, mustacheless (surprise!) gentleman who up until a few weeks ago was a checker in the express aisle and has no theatrical background whatsoever. Cognoscenti know Vargas' name. He has fans. Also competition.

Over to the A&P on Second Avenue. The A&P employs another *enfant terrible* of sidewalk art, 24-year-old Maundy

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Tracy Young is now available to The New Yorker.

Poon. Here Poon has room to breathe—too much room, perhaps: three large windows to fill weekly. Both Poon and Vargas incline toward black comedy of the cinematic sort (homages abound in their work), but we happened to find Vargas in a light-hearted mood, Poon more true to form.

Something dreadful is happening here, something quite Grand Guignol.

Two mannequins in nurse uniforms are leaning over a small table on wheels. There are trays of gleaming instruments; a glaring overhead light reflects in the mock tile floor. A doctor, faceless behind his pale green mask, lurks in one corner, hands outstretched. Wicker hampers overflowing with fruits and nuts and bags of Pepperidge Farm bread crumbs stand on another rolling table.

No, it can't *be*! It's just too horrible! They are . . . stuffing a turkey.

"This is *disgusting*," snorts a man in an Irish tweed hat.

"Eeeuw," agrees the woman at his side.

Arm in arm, they walk into the A&P anyway.

Back at D'Agostino's, Mr. Vargas is gently straightening a mannequin's hem.

"Hey, Manuel, how much for watercress?" a checker yells.

"Twenty-five a bunch," Manuel calls back to her. Success, evidently, has not gone to his head.

We ask him whether his window displays have helped business.

"Well," he replies, blushing and thoughtfully stroking the spot on his upper lip where a mustache would have been appropriate, "they seem to draw a crowd, and pretty soon people get cold and come inside."

Even as he speaks, a half-dozen people wander in to gather and rub their hands together briskly in front of the vegetable bins.

"It's getting kinda crazy, though," he adds, climbing out of the window, satisfied at last.

"Like last week, down at Daitch, they hired this French guy—I forget his name, maybe you know the one I mean—he's done a lot of stuff at Fouchon, machine-gunned a soufflé. . . . "

Vargas raises one eyebrow and continues. "Anyway, they fly him over from Paris, pick him up in the airport in a big Caddy 'cause they know he's got a thing for American cars, and tell him he can do whatever he wants—you know, *carte blanche*. . . . Okay, so what this guy wants to do is wait until noon, when all the elderly ladies like to do their shopping, then he wants to have a meat truck come and drive right *through* the front window!" Vargas shakes his head.

Across First Avenue at Gristede's the goods are stacked up in the windows, neat little pyramids. A pyramid of LeSueur tiny peas, a pyramid of Twining's Earl Gray tea, a pyramid of Brown Gold coffee, a pyramid of mint-flavored pears, a pyramid of Bremmer wafers. And tucked around the top can of each pyramid is a small white paper doily. If you use your imagination they can almost look like Glenda Jackson, as Mary Queen of Scots. ●

A Side Order of Desire

In which Gael Greene explains why great food is like great sex

by Jack Friedman

decadence

"Bring on the dessert . . . I think I am about to die." —Last words of Pierette, sister of the legendary gourmand Brillat-Savarin, who died shortly before her 100th birthday

Pierre is the captain of the Palace—its master of ceremonies—and as such he's seen more power, more money, than most heads of state. So Pierre is unflappable. As cool as dry ice. The Hollywood glitterati, the heavy-hitting industrialists, the Princess of This and the Baron of That . . . *Quel* drag! They bore the hell out of Pierre! Every visitor to the Palace gets the same lacquered-on smile of greeting.

Nearly every visitor, that is.

"Monsieur," Pierre nods his world-weary head. "Madame."

The smile suddenly freezes, becomes a rictus of pure terror. *Merde!*

"Madame. A surprise visit. How nice."

Madame is none other than Gael Greene, a restaurant critic for *New York* magazine. This lady has *juice*—and it's juice of the highest voltage. *New York*'s readership is one of the most affluent in the nation, and when Greene talks, those with disposable income listen. Moreover, they spend. And no one knows this better than Pierre. Till Greene wrote a glowing review in April of '75, the Palace was a virtual graveyard.

Pierre leads the way into the plush, softly lit interior. Past the exquisite antique mirrors. Past the silver serving trolley that cost a silly little 12 grand. Heads swivel. A murmur goes through the room. This svelte, fortyish woman in the simple black dress has the Palace in an uproar.

If it's true that French waiters are either at your feet or at your throat, then Pierre is definitely in the vicinity of Greene's Charles Jourdan sling-back pumps.

"You like to sit here? Or there maybe? Is more light here but is more *intime* there. . . . The air conditioning too high? I adjust. . . ."

Greene isn't exactly basking in all this attention, but she isn't exactly hating every minute of it either. Blasé as she might appear, she admits that she's "psyched" for this evening. Not only is the Palace the most expensive beanery in New York, it is by far the most lavish, the most insanely extravagant. Dinner will consist of no fewer than eight courses. The assault on the senses will last a full four hours. For Greene, who has dedicated her life to "slow death by mayonnaise," this will be more than your run-of-the-mill *petite morte*.

Still, she has her qualms. In print she has called the Palace a "moral outrage." Inevitably, it makes her think of "the swollen bellies of Biafra and Bangladesh." And then there are the very patrons of the Palace: that gaggle of social climbers and conspicuous consumers who "do create a negative feeling. Most of them are *not* Serious Food People."

Greene happens to be a Very Serious Food Person. And to all such as she, the Palace is irresistible.

Pierre opens the bottle of Sancerre Chavignol '76. He presents the cork to Greene, who deftly runs her fingers

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Jack Friedman is a New York writer and editor. Please help him find a better job. A mind is a terrible thing to waste.

Photograph by Larry Couzens

across it. Yes, it's moist; the bottle has been properly stored. He now pours a splash of this straw-colored wine into her heavy cut-crystal goblet. She swirls it, sniffs, takes a sip; she pouts her lips and inhales very slightly. Oxygen brings out the character of the liquid grape.

As Pierre fills the glasses, Greene studies the table. There is a silver and crystal vase containing rosebuds and a spray of baby's breath. A silver candlestick with one elegant taper. The stemware, the dishes, the utensils, the linen . . . everything is rich. Rich to the point of being voluptuous.

"Lovely," she says in her whispery voice. She takes another sip of wine, reaches out to stroke a rose petal. "You see? You see the relationship between dining and making love? You must use all your senses."

For Greene, sex and food have always been deeply intertwined. In fact, *New York* magazine's "Insatiable Critic" writes about food as if it *were* sex; she portrays eating in terms of total surrender, loss of ego, bliss to the point of unconsciousness. She is "seduced" by the silken paté. "Enslaved" by the velvety sauce. Desserts, when they're state-of-the-art, may be sinful or even "mind-shattering." Greene developed this gastro-pornography, she explains, for the benefit of "the average person."

"If you've never really had a transcendent food experience," she says, twirling her wine glass by the stem, "then sexual metaphor is one way of telling you what it feels like. That for one moment you're on another planet, in another world. That for one moment you would do anything—give anything—to have this dish again."

One can't argue with Greene's success. Not only is she the capo-di-capi of New York food critics, she has inspired a host of imitators. Now, all across the country, food writers are experiencing multiple O's at the table.

Conversation drifts toward *Blue Skies, No Candy*, her novel about the adventures of a female Don Juan. Was she aware that her erotic writing was filled with culinary metaphors? Aware that her characters were more concerned with the *taste* of their genitals than the way they had performed?

"Piquant irony," sighs Greene. "That was completely unconscious."

The wine has begun to soften the brain, deaden the nerve endings that control tacky behavior. It's a good thing, for this reporter has an exceedingly tacky subject to bring up: According to a local gossip columnist, a former editor of *New York* has committed a *roman a' clef*; one of the characters in this fiction is said to be "a nymphomaniacal food editor."

Yes, Greene's seen the item. No, she doesn't like it. She might even put a lawyer on this guy's case. "After all," she points out, "there are other things in my life beside food and sex. . . . It's just that off-hand [throaty laugh] I just can't think of any at the moment."

Pierre wheels out the first course on a serving trolley. The silver platter with the calf's liver and sautéed mushrooms is embellished with a foot-high sculpture—in fat—of a chef in a white toque.

We are eating merely for the sake of our tastebuds. Swallowing becomes difficult. The vomitorium beckons

The Beluga caviar is nestled between the wings of a giant swan carved from ice. As the night progresses we will see surreal tableaux involving toasted-bread clipper ships, suet sea captains, chocolate chalets, spun-sugar wishing wells. . . . Somehow, these "presentations" are reminiscent of the *Satyricon*—the section in which Petronius ridicules Roman orgies by having a member of the *nouveau riche* serve an entire donkey surrounded by mice dipped in honey.

Pierre places the calf's liver in front of Greene. She leans over it, breathes deeply, forks up barely a mouthful and rolls it around her educated palate. "I've always wondered what it would be like to eat a baby. I think it would taste like this."

As for the caviar, it's nothing short of spectacular. It's pearl gray in color, and each grain is about the size of double-ought buckshot. It tastes—not like fish, not like any living creature—but like pure essence of ocean.

Greene eats perhaps half of what's on her plate, and Pierre seems to be on the verge of tears. "You don't enjoy?"

"It was marvelous," Greene tells him. "But the portion was too large, too *gross*." Severely chastened, Pierre skulks back to the kitchen. "That's one of my problems," Greene confides. "Sometimes restaurant people try too hard to please me."

A tiny frown appears at the corners of Gael's mouth. A large man in a tuxedo is approaching. From his gait and demeanor you would guess he was a fugitive from an old episode of *Kojak*—perhaps a nickel-and-dime con man who gets iced before the first commercial interruption. But no, this is Frank Valenza, the owner of the Palace. The crown prince of this $80 *prix fixe* fiefdom.

Unlike the proprietors of most *haute* eateries, Valenza isn't at all snobbish or distant. He comes on like gangbusters. Like a tummeler straight from the Catskills. Indeed, there are some epicures—morbidly sensitive, no doubt—who claim that five minutes with Valenza is enough to make you want to yoick up your *foie gras*.

"Ga-el," he croons. "How were the Hamptons?"

Without waiting for a reply, Valenza launches into a monologue about one of his clients who bought an 1870 Lafite for $4,800. Then he's off on a soliloquy regarding the price of caviar. When he opened the Palace three years ago, the stuff cost $90 a pound. Now, with inflation and the decline of the dollar, it's a staggering $250!

"It's crazy!" he all but bellows. "Yeah, but you know me—I gotta have the best."

Valenza is a total anomaly in the sniffy, inbred world of four-star restaurants, but the man has undeniable genius. Knowing that haute cuisine and haute snobbisme go hand in hand, he has consistently generated the most outrageous publicity. And he spends as freely—and wisely—as George Steinbrenner, that other Bronx entrepreneur. He poured three-quarters of a million dollars into the Palace; he snatched superstar chef Michel Fitoussi off the free-agent market; and his food and wine are the best that's available (when truffles are in season, he flies them in, black from France and white from Italy).

As a result of this massive application of money and *chutzpah*, France's prestigious Gault-Millau guide rated the Palace over Lutèce, and no lesser personage than Paul Bocuse—the Obi Wan Kenobi of French food—was "astonished" and "impressed" by the place. Still, Valenza gets dumped on a lot, especially by the "French Mafia"—the small coterie of emigré chefs and owners who run New York's top-rated restaurants.

"I've created a better idea," Valenza says, adding without the least trace of irony, "and that is that 'less is more.'"

And while he will concede that the Palace is for the super-rich, he quickly points out that "The Palace is no more decadent, no more immoral, than a Rolls Royce." It may even serve some useful sociological purpose.

"How can the common man," he asks, "the common man who's made millions of dollars in his life . . ." Valenza catches himself. "How can the common man *who's worked really hard* and made a million dollars . . . how can he enjoy that money? Why shouldn't I give him an opportunity to use it with class and style?" At that even he has to laugh.

Valenza is called away by more pressing duties, and Greene takes a long swallow of Sancerre. How would she describe the owner of the Palace?

"Mind-boggling."

At the table in the far corner sits a

desiccated old man. He's surrounded by three breathtaking young women. Chic, slim, expensively dressed . . . they are the crème de la crème of their profession. Thousand-dollar-a-night whorines.

"*That*," says Gael Greene with a wicked grin on her face, "is the continuation of the Chung Hee Park story."

Green wonders what this odd foursome is into. Spanking? Water sports? Semi-snuff? "No, not kinky enough," she finally decides. "It has to be something really bizarre—like the missionary position."

Pierre appears with another bottle of wine, a Mayacomas '73. He pulls the cork and decants it over a small candle—one of the more sacred rituals of the *haute* eating experience.

"Very little sediment." Pierre tries to sound genuinely surprised by this discovery. But it's difficult; he knows that a five-year-old Cabernet Sauvingnon won't throw off much sediment. Pierre, however, has a role to play. His performance must go by the rules.

"Rules," shrugs Greene. "Some people make a great fetish out of following all the rules. But then some people make a fetish about not being pretentious.

"One wonderful breaking of the rules is having a red wine with fish. Now it's become so popular it's almost a pretention. Almost a rule. . . . Sometimes," she confesses, "all this fuss *is* a bit much."

Pierre once again rolls out the serving trolley. He carves the gigot of venison, puts two slices of blood-red deer on each plate.

Any more would be unseemly. After two hours of saffron-and-mussel soup, oysters and lobster quenelle, scallops in green peppercorn sauce, pasta with garlic tomato and cream, a sourbet with cassis . . . to be hungry would be downright obscene. We are eating merely for the sake of our tastebuds. Swallowing has become difficult. The vomitorium beckons.

A salad is served to "cleanse" the palate. The cheese tray follows: a ripe brie, a St. André *double-crème*, a roquefort Napoleon. The roquefort is by far the most toothsome—and most lethal. Each bite adds a new layer to the mother lode of cholesterol.

Pierre wheels up with a cart of liquors.

"You like a glass of port?"

"Look out," hisses Greene, "this is where they catch you. Valenza marks up his wines 300 percent. . . . How much will it hurt?" she wants to know.

"Ze 1945 is $20. Ze 1912 is $40. And zees one," he rests his hand on an extremely crusty old bottle, "zees one costs . . ."

"As much as a round-trip ticket to Puerto Rico," says Greene, finishing his sentence.

Pierre, caught off balance, cannot suppress a smile.

"Non, Madame. Zees one is only a one-way ticket."

There is a commotion at the door. More than a commotion, actually; it sounds like the Shriners are having a New Years' Eve party and someone has laced the bourbon with LSD. The shrieking, the raucous laughter, are moving closer.

"Good lord," says Greene, suddenly disconsolate. "But at least we've eaten dinner. All they can spoil is dessert."

Considering the general tonyness of the Palace, "they" are a marvelous incongruity. Red-faced, acting as if they're already liquored up, the men are dressed in loud—if not retina-searing—sport coats. Their wives are garbed in the latest from the Sears Roebuck collection. In all, there are ten of these middle-aged Hell's Angels. Even more incongruous than the fact that they're *at* the Palace is that they're given the place of honor—the so-called "King's table." Located in the middle of the room, it's canopied and curtained much in the style of a four-poster bed. Pierre wafts over to inform us, "Zay are from International Harvester."

"It's amazing," Greene shakes her head, "the people who have expense accounts."

After the fruit, the dessert parade begins in earnest: The first trolley offers chocolate mousse layer cake and an apple torte made with Calvados and crème fraiche.

"Just a tiny sliver," says Greene. "I only want to taste the apple torte."

Her instructions are ignored. She is served a manhandler-sized piece. Greene rises to the occasion by scarfing down the whole of it.

"Great food," she sighs, while demurely wiping the crumbs from her mouth, "is like great sex. The more you have, the more you want."

"I've always wondered what it would be like to eat a baby..."

The next half-hour is lost in a haze of chocolate truffles, homemade cookies, petit fours and miniature candies delivered in a chocolate sarcophagus. Not even the hoots, howls and Polish jokes of International Harvester can penetrate this sensual stupor. Not even a "meet me later" wink from one of the dazzling whorines can make an impression. One more bite of food would be instant suicide.

Yet Pierre is wheeling out another tray.

"Oh, no," says Greene. "What in God's name is that?"

"Eez a white choco-lait mousse."

Gael Greene has never eaten that before. She has never *heard* of that before. Pierre smirks. He knows he's got the Insatiable Critic by the short hairs.

"I'm not really a choco-holic," she says. This is while the first spoonful is still on the way to her wanton mouth.

"Oh! . . . OH! . . . This is so wonderful . . . this is sublime. . . . Stop me before I eat it all!"

But there is no stopping her. The white chocolate mousse completely explodes the sensorium. For one delirious moment it even makes the $355 tab seem reasonable.

"Madame, you enjoy the mousse?" This is a rhetorical question. Pierre can clearly see the lifeless husk of almond crêpe that the white chocolate bombshell was wrapped in.

"Yes, very good," says Greene, "heavenly. Do you think I could take one home for my dog?"

"Your *dog*?" Pierre cannot believe he's hearing straight.

"It's a very rare Lhasa apso that can only eat white chocolate."

"Oh? And ze dog would like some strawberry sauce?"

"No, he's allergic.

Pierre thinks this Lhasa apso who can only eat white chocolate just might be a put-on. Muttering softly in the Breton dialect, he walks off to prepare *le sac doggie*.

With the coffee, Valenza sends a bottle of brandy (his compliments) to the table. It is an 1880 cognac, La Paradis. For those unfortunates who dine without food critics, it is an expensive little buzz—80 bucks a pop.

"How is it?" asks Greene.

"The fumes are quite intoxicating. Reminds me of airplane glue."

"Have you ever tried the '72 airplane glue? I thought it a bit insipid."

"But the '73 had that certain insouciance."

"And the '61 was probably the glue of the decade."

We are both laughing uproariously. International Harvester brigade is staring at us as if *we're* the geeks. No matter. We're blissed out on alcohol, butter, cream, caviar, truffles, chocolate, creme fraiche. . . .

A warm feeling begins to envelop the body. The mind grows increasingly peaceful. The urge to sleep becomes harder and harder to deny. I realize I am experiencing the sensations of a drowning victim.

"How do you feel?" asks Gael Greene.

"Like I'm about to die."

"Dying," says the Insatiable Critic, "—that's always tomorrow." ●

The Blackbored Jungle

Hanging out in the American high school

by John Eskow

decadence

The high school corridor, circa 1978, is a theater of noisy wonders: a festival of headslaps, dope buys, nerd-baitings and embraces heavy on the thigh-in-groin action. Three freshmen gather at the too-low fountain (where the water's still warm and flavored with rust) to rehash the latest gore movie: "An' then he cuts off her arm . . ."

"Aw, *neat!*"

"An' all the veins and stuff are hangin' out . . ."

"*Cool*!"

A matronly teacher, overhearing the colloquy, sighs and shakes her head. "No regard for human life. . . ." In her eyes these high school kids, with their easy access to dope and sex and violence, are virtual teenage Neros, signaling the upcoming End.

I had occasion to roam these wondrous corridors for the past four years as a "visiting poet" for the New York Writers-in-the-Schools program. But in the end I found these hallway tableaux more saddening than decadent. There was a sullen undertone, a sense of rebellion choked off in its infancy. If you corner these kids, most will ridicule the idea of changing, or even affecting, the world. All they want, they'll swear, is a taste of what's out there, a job in whatever field opens up, be it corporate law or vibrator repair. Meanwhile, the faculty, holed up in smoky Teachers' Rooms like Butch Cassidy in his Bolivian hideaway, lament what they call the "lack of values" of this generation, contrasting it with "the sixties kids"—who back then seemed aberrant and insulting, but are now described as "vital" and "probing."

I wound up more student than instructor. At first the apparent freedom of the kids enchanted me; during my own high school stint in the mid-sixties, a sausage pizza was about the strongest intoxicant to be had. What was I to make of a pimply sophomore, with a face as long as Goofy's, saying: "Ay, Mistah Eskraut, you're okay. You want to do some coke, man?"

My job, supposedly, was to provoke these adolescents into poetry. With younger students, this is simply a question of opening the gate; given their natural eye for the marvelous, most kids can't wait to scribble fantasies. But after years of institutional dreariness they assume a jaded air, as if almost everything perceivable is beneath contempt. ("That shit is bo-*ring*, Jack.") One peek at the decor of their classrooms and I could sympathize: After a night of illicit thrills, how excited can you get about an oak-tag display on "The Importance of Roughage"?

Hoping to bring them some poetry that would rouse them from their long nap, I first chose Rimbaud, the ultimate punk rocker. Here was another intoxicated teenager, who might speak directly to them. I distributed copies of his strangest poems, with the bo-ring stuff edited out and the sex and narcotics left in. No go.

"Oh city in pain, Oh city half-dead,
With your face and your two breasts pointing towards
the future . . ."

"Teacher?"

"Yes?"

"Was this guy *mental*, or what?"

Then I asked them to bring in poems *they* liked. A surprise: In their literary tastes, most teenagers reveal the wide-eyed children still alive within them. Instead of wild or violent poems, they prefer odes to dead puppies, Gibran-type advisories and saccharine farewells to faded loves. This only serves to make their hip veneer more poignant. And when they're finally persuaded to write their own poems, all the loneliness and terror beneath that veneer comes roaring out.

"An infinity of doors, all
Barred with heavy chains . . ."

That's the image one student used to describe his surroundings, not just within the school but in the world at large. Claustrophobia emerges as the major theme of students' poetry. A visitor wonders: Isn't there any way out? Twelve years ago the high school air felt just as suffocating, but there appeared to be escape hatches everywhere.

Humor, traditionally, is one such escape hatch; the best high school comedy shows an instinctive anarchism. There are, thankfully, still "class clowns" at work: I had one student who'd only speak in a dead-perfect Nixon imitation, and—the master stroke—refused to admit it wasn't his own voice. But more and more, kids have come to rely on pre-fab punch lines from sitcoms and movies (*Happy Days*, *Animal House*), or favored comedians ("Excuuuse me," recited *ad nauseum*). These are touchstones rubbed so often that they're bereft of meaning.

Writing is another escape hatch, and many teenagers still use it that way. "To ride off on a motorcycle, alone./To ride into the hills where no one knows my name. . . ." That came unsolicited from a brawny and supposedly dumb linebacker. There are unexpected pleasures in their writing, but the students are rarely able to share them. One frail senior girl wrote moving, visionary poems; at my urging, she read one aloud. The class sat dully, rolling its collective eyes. Later the girl stopped me in the hall, angry tears on her face. "It took me four years to build a cover identity in this school," she cried, "and now my cover's blown. Tell me: How am I supposed to *live* here?"

It would be comforting to be able to answer: "Soon you'll leave this place and enter the adult world, where your poems will be treasured." But it would also be a lie, and she knew that. So maybe the ennui that prevails is the New Realism.

The notion that people might become impassioned about ideas strikes many kids as vaguely eccentric at best, "ree-*tah*-did" at worst.

One day, pressing this point, I asked if the American Revolution was fought over an idea. Heads nodded. Okay, what idea? Bobby, a big kid in the front row, clenched the muscles of his forehead in thought. Then he brightened, realizing the answer, and flung both hands in the air, almost lunging over his desk top in his eagerness to be called on.

"Bobby—what idea was the Revolution fought for?"

"*Public relations?*"

My laughter was instinctive, out of control; Bobby, hurt, never said another word in class. Afterwards, berating myself, I wondered what I'd found so funny. ●

Among John Eskow's previous pieces for New Times *were profiles of Hank Williams Jr. and Carl Yastrzemski.*

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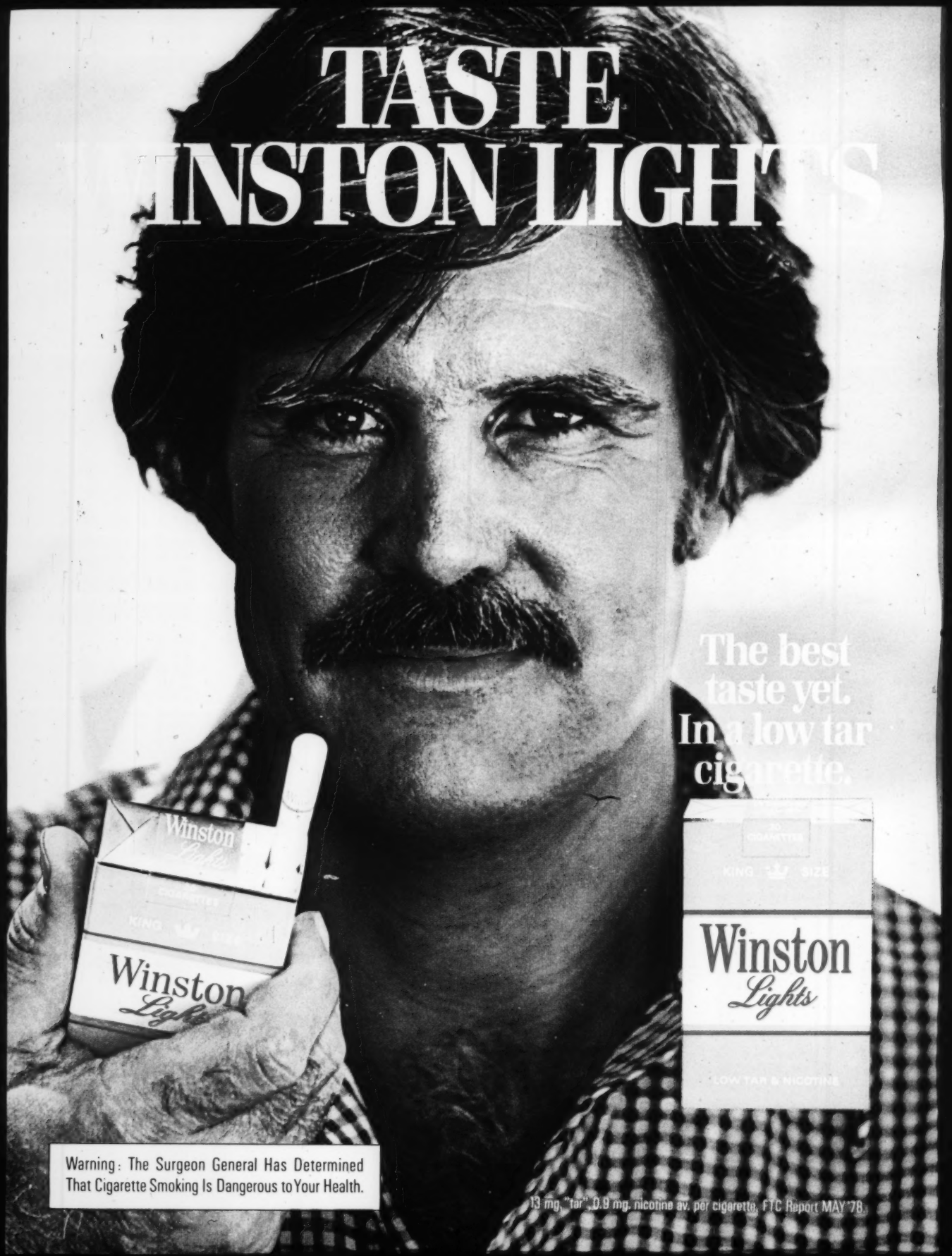
VOLKSWAGEN DOES IT AGAIN


TASTE
INSTON LIGHTS
The best
taste yet.
In a low tar
cigarette.

Warning: The Surgeon General Has Determined
That Cigarette Smoking Is Dangerous to Your Health.
13 mg. "tar", 0.9 mg. nicotine av. per cigarette, FTC Report MAY '78.

decadence

Brainwatching

How TV advertisers manipulate the minds of children

by Jerry Mander

A good way to evaluate a society, its sanity or insanity, is to examine the way it treats its children.

We think of our own as a society that cares about kids. Most children have the opportunity to be educated. Most have enough to eat. We have laws against sexual abuse and physical maltreatment of children, though there's a lot of it going on. We forbid children to work at most kinds of labor.

But we still allow a very small number of well-educated, sophisticated people, of tremendous power and skill, to devote full time, and use complex technologies, to put images into children's heads—images designed to train them for a lifetime of consumerism.

Television advertisers spend more than $600 million a year on commercials directed at children under 12. The average child, watching more than five hours of TV per day, sees more than 50 of these spots daily, about 18,000 per year.

During the next few months, the Federal Trade Commission will hold hearings on whether such advertising should continue. The hearings might result in a commission rule forbidding TV ads directed at kids under eight. Or they might result in the banning of all commercials for sugary products (i.e., cereals) directed at children. Or they might result in "counter-commercials" to "educate" children about advertising—what it does to them and what it leaves out.

The staff of the FTC has taken a surprisingly radical position for a government agency, stating that *all* TV commercials aimed at young children are "inherently" unfair and deceptive. The February 1978 staff report concludes that children can't distinguish between programs and ads, that children under eight can't appreciate a commercial's "selling intent" and that kids do not have the defenses against commercial appeals that rational adults are presumed to have. There is a "striking imbalance of sophistication and power between well-financed adult advertisers and children," says the report, adding that this imbalance violates a long-standing principle of the "rational consumer."

The "rational consumer" is the standard by which the market system assumes a rough balance of sophistication and information between a seller and a buyer. It is on this basis that subliminal advertising was attacked in the past. "It can hardly be argued," says the FTC report, "that any such balance exists between the advertiser who is prepared to spend many thousands of dollars just to produce a single 30-second commercial, and a three-year-old child who has no idea what the idea of a commercial is, and looks up to even an animated cartoon elf in such a commercial as an appropriate figure to trust, heed, and imitate."

The FTC staff proposals have been met by derision, not only from the advertising trade press and the industries involved, but from the Eastern liberal press. *The Washington Post*, for example, called the FTC "a great national nanny." More than $2 million has been raised by the ad industry for public relations, lobbying and lawsuits to fight the case.

Jerry Mander, a former advertising executive, is the author of Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television *(Morrow).*

Illustration by Larry Weil

Committees of Congress have threatened FTC appropriations, and one committee actually succeeded in holding up FTC funding for several months earlier this year. Another proposed slashing the FTC's powers, and a third suggested that either house of Congress should have the power to overrule a federal agency. Calls have been issued for staff resignations. And a lawsuit in which Kellogg Company was a plaintiff succeeded in prohibiting FTC chairman Michael Pertschuk from further participation in the "kid-vid" proceedings, on grounds that he "prejudged" the issues.

All of these skirmishes aside, however, the most significant thing is that such a fight is necessary at all. That there is

The only good solution was the more radical one: *no* advertising to kids

even a question about whether it is acceptable to advertise to children is itself a sign of something aberrant in the values we live by.

We fail to realize the degree to which our culture has moved inside of, is enveloped by and accepts commodity life—so much so that all extensions of it seem normal and even logical. Nor do we really understand the nature of advertising power.

I have many friends who tell me that TV commercials don't "get to" them, and most of us feel we have developed defenses sufficient to deal with advertising. Unlike children, most adults are aware that commercials are different from programs, that advertisers are trying to sell us something. We know they'll lie if they can get away with it, and when they cannot, they'll use misleading innuendo. Many of us realize that advertisers, even those who tell "the truth," only tell the part that is favorable to them; ads for sugary cereals don't volunteer that sugar ruins your teeth and, some doctors say, your heart.

But the notion that we've developed some rational resistance to commercials beyond what children can muster is not so true as we think. Anyone who has helped create TV commercials is aware that they work whether or not viewers know them to be "real," whether or not they're aware of selling intent, even whether or not the viewer knows the untold part of the story. In fact, advertisers make little effort to deal with such factors because they don't much matter. Advertisers rarely try to make a commercial look real. And very few commercials indulge in product claims with which you could agree or disagree. The ad message, in fact, has nothing to do with such objective elements.

Check your TV tonight and you'll find that the average beer, cosmetics, packaged food or oil company makes few concrete statements that could be called "true" or "false." This applies also to recent political advertising. Most TV ads are free of analyzable content, and advertisers are wise to keep things that way. Content only gets in the way when they are delivering the *true* content—a mood, a quality of pseudo-intimacy and, most important, a system of images. If the advertiser says nothing that can be disagreed with, while occupying the viewer's mind with commercial images, even if those images involve a lot of silliness (in fact *better* if they are silly, since it makes us less guarded), then the imagery rides directly into our minds, imprinting our brains. Whatever critical resources we bring to the experience, there's no stopping the image from going in. It bypasses critical faculties. Worse, once the image is fixed, there's no way to get it back out. (Try erasing the image of the McDonald's logo from your mind.) When the image is repeated—and all commercial images *are* repeated—they are that much more effective.

Once they have been implanted in your mind, you carry them around like internal billboards. When you see the product there is a "click" of recognition. That's all the advertiser wanted. The more images of the product you carry, the more likely you are to buy it—if not now, then later. What's more, looked at nationally, the more commercials for *anything* that fill people's minds, the more the whole nation becomes enveloped by, and narrowed in, the direction of commodity life. As far as the entire commodity system is concerned, it doesn't matter whether you buy aspirin, Bufferin or Empirin, whether you buy a Dodge or a Ford. Though specific companies may compete with one another for a specific market, they are united in a greater cause: selling you *something*.

This makes children all the more important, of course, since once trained to view life in terms of commodities they have that many more years of productive consumption. In fact, one argument the ad industry uses to justify advertising aimed at kids is that "it trains them for their future life as consumers."

Of course, television is the ideal instrument to reach children with, since most don't read. Children, like their parents, spend more time watching television than doing anything but sleeping, working or going to school. The images that television provides become their primary mental environment. Advertisers actually spend more money, $40 billion annually, than is spent on all of secondary education.

Saturday morning. You are watching TV with your kids. The cartoons stop and the following commercial comes on:

Most TV ads are free of analyzable content, and advertisers are wise to keep things that way

A clown and Eddie the Elephant are dancing and singing the praises of a breakfast cereal. They run to a playground and, finding some happy kids with their happy mom, lay the box of cereal of them. Cheers. They all proclaim how good it is for you with bananas and milk. Suddenly the clown stops talking and turns to the camera. He slowly pulls off his red wig, then his nose. He wipes his makeup off with his sleeve. He looks tired. Eddie the Elephant also stands up and unzips his costume, revealing a young woman. Everyone turns silently to the camera. The clown speaks: "Listen, kids, this is not a playground." He reaches back and tears away the paper backdrop, revealing a studio. "And I'm not a clown. My name is Jay Dugoff, I live in Hollywood and I'm an actor. So is everyone else here, right?" They all say yes. "The reason we're all doing this is that the people who

make this cereal have given me a lot of money to make believe I like it. It's so much money, it's probably more than your parents make all month. I don't like this cereal, and I never eat it. And I'll tell you something, it's not good for you. It's mostly made of sugar, and sugar is bad for your teeth. If you eat a lot of this stuff, you'll probably have to go to the dentist a lot. The only good things on that table we showed you were the bananas and milk. You'd be better off eating those and skipping the cereal."

This little commercial hasn't appeared on television, nor will it. It's a rough draft of a "counter-commercial." I started work on it at the request of Robert Choate, chairman of the Washington-based Council on Children, Media and Merchandising, one of several groups that have been working for a decade to allay the influence of children's advertising. Choate wanted to create a series of such commercials, hoping the FTC would require that they be aired. He wanted spots on subjects like the workings of the marketplace, how advertising can trick you, the effects of repetition and why some things are advertised and some aren't.

Choate spoke to me of developing a "questioning intellect" in children who watch television, a quality adults are presumed to have: the ability to analyze and doubt. Choate wants to "lower the age of the Q.I.," so that children would be better defended against ads.

I agreed to try some spots, but had an uncomfortable feeling about them and finally begged off. I didn't feel that adults had such a hot Q.I. when it came to the effects of imagery, and I thought it was absurd to expect it of a five-year-old. Even if we could "lower the age" of a questioning intellect, do we want to? I wasn't sure it was a good idea to take little kids, totally open and receptive, and give them a short course in cynicism. Are we to put them in the position of judges, trying to decide who's telling the truth, commercial or counter-commercial? Should kids have to deal with such issues at all? Do we have any more right to manipulate them than do the cereal companies? We'd be using advertising but also helping to glamorize it. On the other hand, we don't want to leave the field to the cereal companies alone. It looked like a mess, either way. It was clear that the only good solution was the more radical one: *no* advertising to kids.

I once told Tracy Westen, deputy director of the FTC's Bureau of Consumer Protection, about the spot I had started to work on. He said that I'd better watch out. For example, that clown in *my* spot was not, in fact, working for a cereal company but for *me*. "I'd be very pleased if you could teach children to apply what they learn from one commercial to all others," Westen said, but he added that it might be "difficult if not impossible to do so." To illustrate the point, Westen showed me the classic Piaget procedure used to determine whether a child can take knowledge gained from one situation and form a general conclusion. He placed two identical pencils—same color, same length—parallel to each other. He asked me to guess which was longer. "They are the same," I answered. He then took the pencil lying nearer to me and turned it at an angle; he asked again which pencil was longer. "They're the same, of course," I said.

"If you ask a child under seven which is longer," Westen said, "the child will almost invariably say that the pencil turned at an angle was the longer, even if, before, the child had said they were the same. Then, if you put the pencils parallel again, the child will again say they're the same length. In other words, there are principles that adults can learn using a logic that kids apparently can't employ."

I asked Westen how he thought this month's hearings would go.

"I'm tremendously optimistic," he said. "We have an amazing amount of really powerful testimony." For example, Westen said, a University of Toronto researcher told the staff of an "incredible machine" that he had used in tests with children.

"He sits a kid in front of a TV set while, say, some McDonald's commercials are on the screen," Westen said. "From behind the set he shoots an infrared beam at the kid's eyes. The beam bounces off the eye in such a way that the bounced-back beam makes a little white dot somewhere on the commercial image.

"So you can follow what the kid is watching. The guy has made a film of the process, and what you see is a little white dot moving back and forth between Ronald McDonald and the McDonald's logo, sort of ingraining that association. It's absolutely eerie."

Only 100 corporations account for roughly 80 percent of network TV time

Advertisers argue that the FTC should not interfere in the parent-child relationship. But, says FTC chairman Michael Pertschuk, "The question raised by industry—what gives government the right to interfere in the parent-child relationship—is the wrong one. The right question is, at what age do we as a society permit manufacturers, with their sophisticated advertising techniques, to intervene in that relationship? When do we as a society tell advertisers that they can go after our kids?"

The industry response: free speech, the First Amendment! But it's a specious argument. The First Amendment was written in a period when the only means of expression were personal speech and print media—handbills, letters, posters, books, newspapers. No single medium, and surely no single pamphleteer or publisher, was large enough to dominate the public perception. Advertising barely existed.

The authors of the First Amendment could not have foreseen the scope of today's mass media. The very existence of television, speaking into 250 million minds for more than four hours daily, makes possible a staggering degree of information concentration by whoever can control it.

Nor could the authors of the First Amendment have known that a few corporate advertisers would be able to dominate America's mass media. Television network advertising is unique among "speech" forms in that, since it costs $125,000 per prime-time minute, it can only be used by the stupendously wealthy. In our society, these are the corporations. Perhaps the most shocking statistic about TV, and one of the last noted, is that only 100 corporations (out of 450,000) account for roughly 80 percent of network TV time. And, of course, there are 250 million nonincorporated humans who have virtually no access to TV time at all.

Network TV is effectively a private medium for these 100 corporate advertisers—and this is anomalous to the feeling and intent of the First Amendment. It's a sign of their dominance, and our submission, that we have let things go so far. ●

Disco Tech

The sixties are really dead

by Andrew Kopkind

decadence

There is a sound to the seventies, a background boogie that beats a tattoo for these times, a rhythm that defines this decade in the way that Jazz and Rock came to name those ages now gone by. Everyone with ears to hear or toes to tap knows by now that the new sound is disco, a pervasive phenomenon of popular culture that seems to include and express what is characteristic of these years: the driving energies and empty excesses, the hype and the heat, the fantasy and fashion, the beautiful and the banal.

Disco is the sound, but it is also the word—as grease was the word, as hip was once the word. Disco music may have only minor merit as melody, but it makes a major metaphor for the sensibility of the generation. The insistent beat and synthetic flourishes of the disco hits travel beyond the dance clubs and the sidewalk stereos: The music has come to stand for the culture and its attitudes, the values, visions and intentions of a decade of sparkle and speed.

Disco is an inevitable revolt against the "natural" sixties, the sincerity and pretentions, the struggles and the pain, the small triumphs and final failures of the last generation. Disco affirms the "unreal" seventies, emphasizing surfaces over substance, mood over meaning, body over mind, going out over staying in. If *Easy Rider* was the defining movie of the last cultural era, *Star Wars* makes the same claim today. The former was rough, rocky, romantic and self-conscious; the latter is sleek, expensive, artificial and controlled: like the dancing, like the drugs, like the writing, the heroes, the stars.

The disco culture has a look and a feel as well as a sound. It is *People* magazine, Farrah Fawcett, *Midnight Express*, cocaine, Halston, Donna Summer, jogging suits, Cuisinarts. The values that lie buried beneath those artifacts and tastes are illustrated by the music: Disco is the dominant graphic design of the culture, doing in its elements what Art Deco did to suggest the mood of the thirties.

What makes the music so important is its extraordinary penetration into our lives and the commercial power it contains. The disco industry accounts for $4 billion worth of the GNP nowadays (more than movies). Half the hits on the record charts this year have been disco numbers, and the percentage will increase in 1979. All-disco radio stations have moved into most major markets in the last six months, and in several areas (New York and Boston, for instance) they have already outdistanced the classic rock stations. New labels, such as Casablanca, have challenged the "big three" record companies—Warner's, RCA and Columbia—with soaring disco sales.

A new cultural elite of disco performers, producers and promoters has emerged to compete with the rock establishment. These successful newcomers are plugged into the disco culture and can feel its rhythms: They know what makes a hit, they know how to keep ahead of the mushrooming market, they have assimilated the attitudes and tastes of the times.

It was easy to trace the route of jazz up the river from New Orleans, and the progress of rock 'n' roll from black blues and white country music through Elvis into middle-class white America. With disco it's more tortuous: There are elements of rhythm and blues, Motown, African drums and Latin sambas rolled into a distinctive, if constraining, mold. Disco's passage into the mass audience has taken it through an unlikely scene: the urban gay male community.

"There is a big cultural difference between rock and disco," says Casablanca's promotion wizard, Kenn Friedman, "and it's gayness. Disco began in gay clubs: These were the first entertainment institutions of gay life." Adds John Luongo, one of Boston's top disco entrepreneurs: "In the beginning there was the gay audience. The 'primo' disc jockeys were gay. Disco was high energy, emotional, physical; liberation made gays much more loose that way. Now there's gay chic, so it's hard to tell what part of disco is essentially gay, and what part has been stolen by the straights."

Sexual liberation across the board of preferences is perhaps the most vital political development of the seventies, and it is not surprising, after all, that music that has its roots in one section of that social dynamic has become the most vital aspect of the whole culture. What's still problematic is its historic meaning. The disco scene is considered decadent not only for its wretched excesses, but from its association with sexually liberated styles. For despite the liberation ethic of the last decade, America is still confined by Puritan ideals. Sex itself is considered decadent if conducted in any form more imaginative than the missionary position. Music that carries a sexual charge—as disco so clearly does—is both fascinating and threatening. It is difficult now to dismiss it as dirty or lewd; but it may be categorized, with all its trappings, as an example of the death of American innocence, the decline of the West.

But the same was said of jazz and rock 'n' roll, and like them, disco is here to stay. Some survivors of the sixties still resist the rhythms and battle the beat, but as we round the bend to the eighties the most innovative talents in pop music are focusing on disco, and it's likely the sound will spread. All the contradictions are included: the vibrant energy and the slender superficiality, the controlled physicality and the desperate trendiness. While in the blare of the music and the swirl of the lights it may be hard to believe in the future, there is life after disco, and it will be up to the fast dancers and mood synthesizers to forge its forms. ●

Andrew Kopkind has never been to Studio 54.

decadence

The Body Shop

It's *so* you!

Body Boutique: Just imagine, not too far in the future, this ad copy: Abbey rents. Noses any size or shape. Match the whole family. Change at will. Available for long-term leases or one-night stands: new eyes, necks, hips, stomachs (bypasses can be arranged). Keep your look as long as you wish; just remember, it's only a generation deep. Our special for this month for women over 40: The Betty Ford look. Be the First Lady of the land.

Come in and browse. Our experts will tailor your *new* look for your *new* personality.

Illustration by Gahan Wilson

Sado Machismo

Homosexuality may be trendy at the moment, but gay S&M makes even the fashionable squeamish

by Edmund White

decadence

A stange thing is happening among gay men in the United States. These creatures—or rather we creatures—are moving, month by month, toward sadomasochism. A straight woman whom I've known for years insists on regarding the gay men she likes as sensitive, gentle, poetic, vulnerable; as Art Deco figurines; pairs of youths with dreamy eyes, sad mouths, slender figures, their fingers lightly linked, their bodies in *contraposto* as they wander into the sunset to strains of Fauré. "He's a lovely guy," is her comment."Sweet. Sensitive."

But the scandal is that the lovely guy on his way home picks up a trick whom he insults and penetrates with a fist or a dildo as big as a fist. The dreamy eyes are narrowed into slits of hatred, and the sad mouth barks out jeering obscenities to a "slave" whose wrists are handcuffed and whose head is encased in a black leather mask. What would she say if she knew the whole horrible truth? If she recognized that Fred and Bob—those charmers who've redecorated her house in Bernardsville, who sent her to James Robinson for the best reproductions of antique silver and to a wizard on Long Island for expert marquetry work—that one of those charmers (Fred) spends hours at home in stocks while Bob feeds him from a dog dish?

I ask the question in a straight magazine with some trepidation. Homosexuality may be trendy on college campuses, at beach resorts, in discos, but it is also subject to renewed legal oppression. All too many straight people are unaware of the fact that homosexual acts, even between consenting adults, are illegal in 35 out of 50 states. While hip straights are socializing with gays and coyly hinting that they themselves might have "tendencies," that they, too, might swing, gays in small towns are losing their jobs and being ostracized for their sexual preference.

And so it seems a bit ill-timed on my part to bring up the unassimilable new fact of gay sadomasochism. Most of the straight people I know, especially women, are revolted by it. Unbridled gay promiscuity, a trick a night, seems hard enough to deal with, not to mention the queasy-making thought of two men having it off together, no matter how gently and affectionately they perform the act. As for gay S&M, it is as disturbing for heterosexuals to contemplate as was the thought of fair Celia on the potty for Jonathan Swift.

If it didn't sound too much like gay chauvinism, I'd suggest that gays have often pioneered the frontiers of urban single life. Gay fashions quickly become Fashion, and gay sadomasochism may portend yet another trend among straights, at least those living in this decade rather than some more comfortable time past. The dirty-book stores are already crowded with magazines for heterosexual sadists and masochists (Barbarella in stiletto heels whipping a supine man in a French maid's mobcap and starched white apron). Not long ago, one New York leather bar for gay men experimented with setting aside Tuesdays for straight S&M couples, and one woman prostitute I know makes a killing pissing on male commodities brokers. Even the S&M boutiques attract timid straight couples asking to examine that, uh, restraint harness. . . .

So if an *entente cordiale* is being formed between sophisticated straights and gays, both parties should know what they're getting into. And more and more gay men (though by no means the

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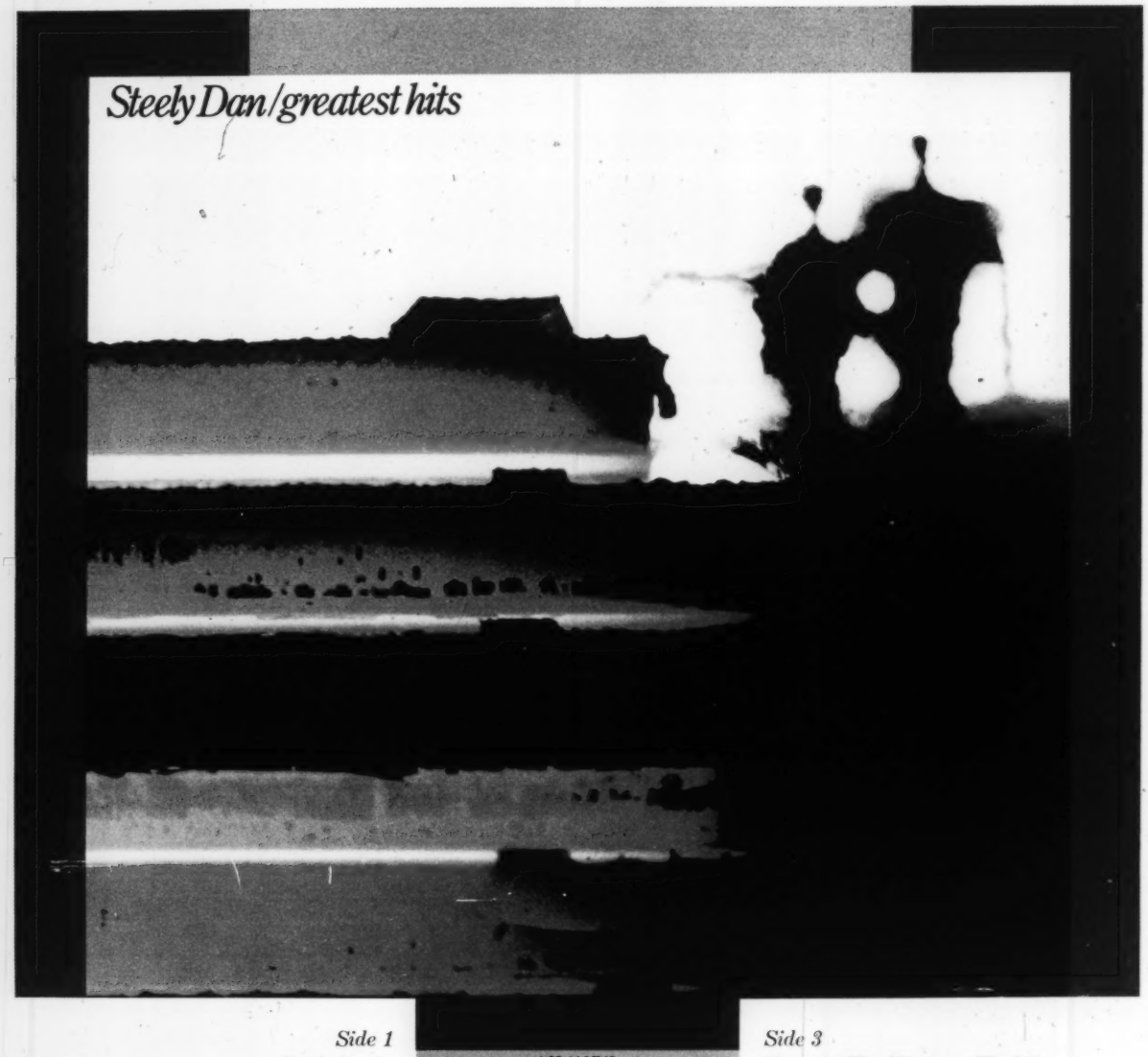
Edmund White is the author of a novel, Forgetting Elena, *and co-author of* The Joy of Gay Sex. *His second novel,* Nocturnes for the King of Naples, *has just been published.*

Photographs by Jimmy De Sanna © 1978

Steely Dan/greatest hits



Side 1

Do It Again
Reeling In The Years
My Old School
Bodhisattva

Side 2

Show Biz Kids
East St. Louis Toodle-oo
Rikki Don't Lose That Number
Pretzel Logic
Any Major Dude

AK-1107/2

Side 3

Here At The Western World†
Black Friday
Bad Sneakers
Doctor Wu
Haitian Divorce

Side 4

Kid Charlemagne
The Fez
Peg
Josie

Produced by Gary Katz

†Previously unreleased

majority) are finding themselves drawn toward the trappings, the aura, the *threat*—if not always the reality—of sexual violence. And these trappings are increasingly in evidence on the streets as leather-clad men, cock-rings instead of hearts on their sleeves, trudge through the city of night. In San Francisco a gay bath house has fantasy rooms devoted to bondage, water sports, pain. Customers state their preferences on a bulletin board; no one need waste time with an uncongenial partner, nor can anyone complain later that he didn't know what was in store. In Los Angeles the police are so repressive that gays must lie low. Most of the men resent this tyranny, but one gay restaurant, The Academy, has all the waiters dressed as cops.

In New York a motorcycle club rents a three-deck ship for its annual party. Hundreds of paying guests board the ship near Wall Street late at night and are sailed through autumn mist up the Hudson. On the lowest deck beer and fried chicken are served. The middle deck has been converted into a disco, and serious sadists are faced with the difficult question as to how abandoned on the dance floor they can be and still maintain their menacing image; a lumbering roll from boot to boot is the self-conscious compromise. On the top deck the lights have been doused: the orgy floor. A porno flick casts light from the screen onto one kneeling figure sobbing in his chains, on another stripped and bent forward to service two masters at once, one fore, the other aft. Two enterprising souls have set up shop beside a quart can of Crisco; by the time the ship returns to port they have received a thorough proctological exam from at least half the other passengers.

But on any night of the week such sights can be observed in the Village at a private club. Four dollars at the door buys one drink and admission to the huge painhouse. As your eyes adjust to the gloom, you see one guy whipping another. Over there someone who checked all his clothes in the coatroom is hoisted aloft in a leather swing. Those men are pressed to the wall, facing it. A punishment? No, the wall, you discover, has been pierced with crotch-high "glory holes," and on the other side of the partition someone even now is being covered in glory. In the basement two stoned men are kissing under black light. Absurdly, touchingly, anachronistically romantic, they are unaware of everyone around them, their fluorescent white shirts gleaming eerily like Baudelaire's swan bathing its wings in the dust.

The oldest and dumbest joke about S&M has the masochist saying "Beat me," and the sadist replying "No." What's all wrong about the joke is that it assumes sadism is the same thing as psychological cruelty. A playwright who's known to be a sadist is presumed to be cruel to his audiences ("No wonder that play went on so long"). Of an English poet whose verse follows strictly traditional forms, some wiseacre remarks, "But of course the forms are *strict*. If you'd seen him in his saturnine leathers you'd understand his craving for *discipline*."

So thoroughly corrupted are we by the Freudian parlor game that such interpretations have become the ordinary stuff of conversation; we are all rabbis and life is the copious Talmud awaiting our narrow exegesis. The hermeneutics convince us that a life—my life, your life, anyone's life—is all of a piece. He's cruel in bed and cruel at work. Proust tortured mice for fun and tortures us by going on and on in his Big Book.

Gay sadomasochism may portend yet another trend among straights, at least those living in this decade

But what if each of us is not unified but piecemeal? What if the parts oppose rather than duplicate one another? Sam the sadist is a loyal and loving son, a beneficent employer; and the motorcycle club he heads sponsors an annual benefit for handicapped kids. The playwright is famous for his own work with the disabled, the poet for his long hours of patient advice to his students; and Proust was a proverb of kindness (when he found 200 mistakes in 23 galley pages, he begged the proofreader not to take the discovery of these errors "for a reproach").

More to the point, sadism itself is not cruel. Those gay "top men" I've quizzed have admitted, somewhat sheepishly, that they seldom inflict much pain beyond a few slaps and light licks with a belt. So theatrical (or filmic) is sadomasochism that even the blows are designed to look and sound more violent to the (usually imaginary) audience than they actually are; the belt is doubled, the punishing hand is cupped.

Marijuana, poppers, mescaline and beer stimulate the imagination to such a fever that by merely standing over the cowering slave a master is able to suggest an assault. At every point the experienced master can judge whether his slave wants more or less pain. And sometimes the sadist will ask *sotto voce* if things are getting too heavy. Naturally there are some sadists who, like Sade himself, can be aroused only by inflicting pain, but these are in the minority. Ankle restraints are plush-lined; the paddle is *commedia dell'arte* slapstick.

The violence resides almost entirely in the language. One man licking another's Frye boots would be hilarious were the act not labeled "humiliation." Someone once remarked that in adolescence pornography is a substitute for sex, whereas in adulthood sex is a substitute for pornography; the S&M rap (that muttered or shouted stream of abuse, obscenity, military commands) is the conflation of pornography and sex, the marriage of signifier and signified, an act of extraordinary semiotic condensation. So essential is language to sadomasochism that a fully satisfying leather scene could be the most humdrum sex accompanied by a really filthy soundtrack. The parts of the body become fetishized through talk, exalted by four-letter words to a paradise of brutality. And one man performing fellatio on another is transported far from his high-rise aerie to the heartache and longing of his childhood by having to call his dominant partner "Daddy."

The popularity of sadomasochistic sex has introduced new words into the gay vocabulary—as well as their domesticated, more casual variants. The original terms, such as *slave* and *master*, must have seemed too absurd, too theatrical, not quite plausible, too . . . well, embarrassing. It is socially awkward to ask a stranger if he wants to be your "slave" for the night. The word evokes dungeons, chains, pornographic novels of the 18th century—a sort of period claptrap. As a result, "sadomasochism" has become "S&M" or, more recently and innocuously, "rough stuff." "Sadist" and "masochist" are now "top man" and "bottom man." The way to ask someone to be your slave, therefore, is "Are you into a bottom scene?" Sexual aggression kept on the level of fantasy is a "head trip," whereas to crave physical abuse is to be "into pain." And the "dungeon" has become the "game room."

Why is S&M erupting now, precisely when gays presumably have been liberated from role-playing stereotypes and may at last be on the verge of integration into straight society? Could it be that gays don't want to go respectable, that S&M is a nostalgia for the criminal past? Could it be that liberation has given gays permission to stop being sissies and to become the he-men forbidden by the typology of the past?

One book published recently condemns gay S&M as an expression of self-hatred. Like those Jews in concentration camps who Bruno Bettelheim claims impersonated Nazi officers, sadomasochists may be identifying with the oppressor. The sadist who torments his slave by calling him a "faggot" is only, according to this interpretation, buying the denigrating terms of heterosexual society and, by repeating them, assuring himself of his own "normality."

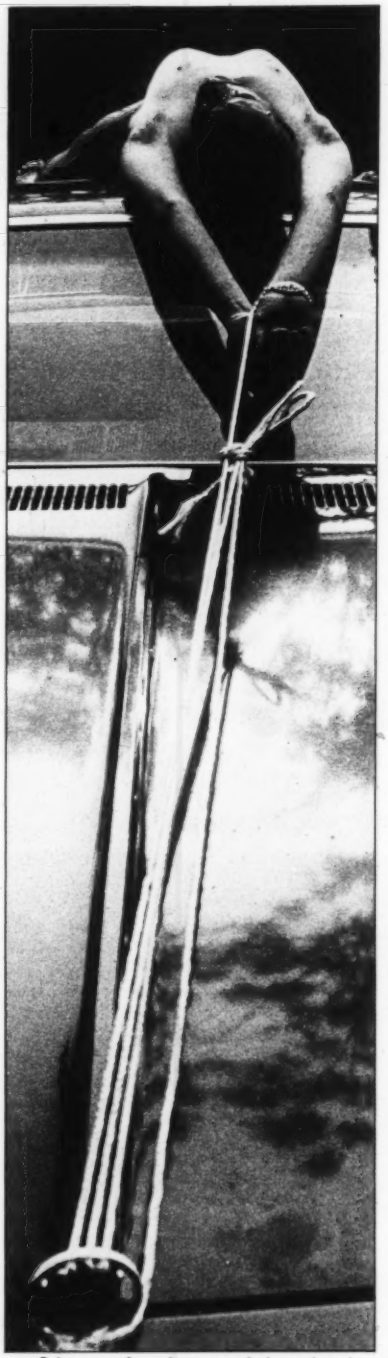
But if S&M were really a way of identifying with the straight oppressor, we would expect the typical leather man to be older rather than younger, closety rather than overt, conformist rather than blatant. We'd expect him to be from the conventional, guilt-prone lower middle class, and we'd guess that S&M must have been more prevalent in the pre-liberation 1950s than in the 1970s. In fact, however, the S&M crowd is composed of all age groups, and it's aggressively gay and exists defiantly outside ordinary society, even ordinary gay society. Edgar Gregersen, a New York professor of anthropology who is preparing a study of straight and gay S&M, has interviewed scores of leather men and discovered that they are generally college-educated WASPs from the middle and upper classes. And gay S&M is definitely more popular since the advent of the homosexual liberation movement. The leather man, far from hiding in a business suit, is the most conspicuous figure on the streets. Garbed in chains and skin-tight cowhide, he has the nerve (so like that of the despised drag queen) to wear openly the badge of his fantasies. Leather is always a sexual statement, as much as a prostitute's high-rise wig and six-inch heels. Would someone who hates his own homosexuality proclaim it so loudly?

There's another theory: that gay S&M is a safe outlet for throttled rage. Sadism is, presumably, a way for uptight men to release their thunderbolts under the guise of passion. The masochist has indicated his readiness to be punished, and to abuse him seems to be simple compliance, almost charity. Still better, the anger can always be disavowed and laughed off later as just part of a game.

Some of Gregersen's findings support this interpretation. Leather men he's interviewed report that they are or have been vegetarians or pacifists. If not *always* liberal, many are at least libertarian in their politics, averse to authoritarianism of every stripe and hell-bent on defending individual rights.

If one, rather cynically, assumes that pacifism, vegetarianism, humaneness toward animals and libertarianism are indicative of repressed urges toward violence, then a case could be made for the theory that links S&M to contained rage. To me, however, these beliefs and character traits are more readily attributable to an active imagination, to empathy, to what Keats called "negative capability"—the power to project oneself into another creature's skin. Such a capacity makes S&M itself possible; no one would be drawn toward the drama of domination (nor would he be good at it) unless he could project himself into the mind of the dominated.

Perhaps the leather man, far from being a stunted, diminished person, is in fact a privileged being. Perhaps his



confidence, freedom and imagination allow him to dramatize social tensions that fascinate everyone. He may not fully grasp the conflicts he acts out, but he at least may have the courage to live them rather than just observe them.

These tensions are largely political. Like Marie Antoinette's milkmaids or those Spanish ladies who dressed up as *majas*, the gay sadomasochist, though himself a member of the elite, impersonates working men—truck drivers, construction workers, telephone linemen. When I've asked leather guys whether they'd rather make it with a real Con Ed man or a lawyer who looks like one, the question baffles them. It lies outside the system of their fantasies. In their hearts they may know that the lawyer would be the more adventurous and uninhibited lover, but their passion demands he at least appear to be a worker.

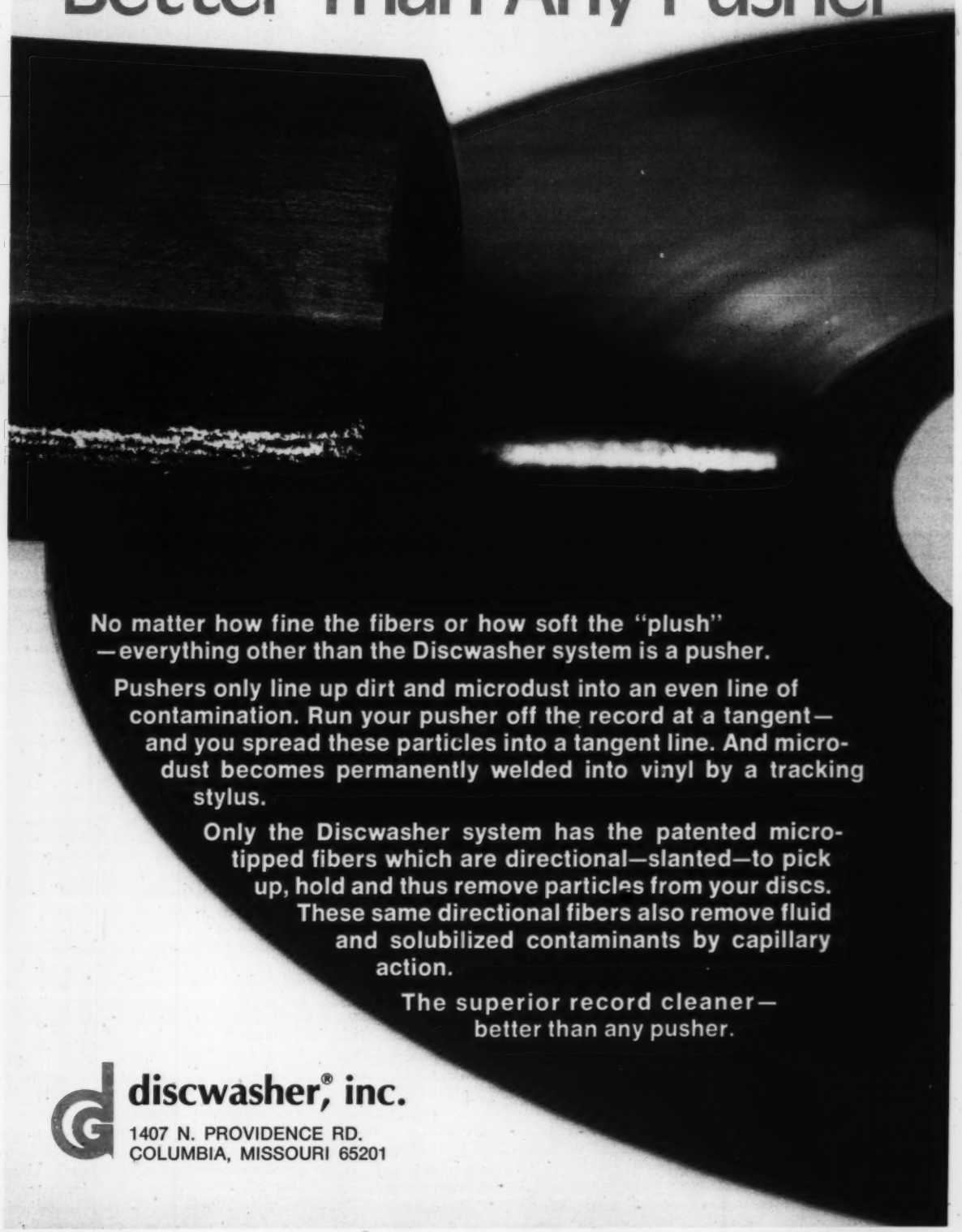
Of course, why shouldn't lawyers masquerade as workers? The children of the middle class grew up without seeing any signs of sexuality emanating from their daddies, those corporation drudges in bulky suits who never whistled at women or scratched their deodorized crotches. The only bare chests were those of construction workers; the only tight clothes were those of Hollywood cowboys; the only images of male raunch were of Marlon Brando astride his bike or caterwauling for Stella. There is no middle-class sexual style for men. What would it be based on? Golfing? Discussing stock options? Attending church? Downing highballs?

But I think the impersonation of working people goes beyond borrowing their real or fancied sex appeal. I think it's a way of drawing the poisons from the body politic.

In 1919 Freud, unable to explain why children, war victims and many psychoanalytic patients deliberately recreated earlier traumatic experiences down to the last painful detail, formulated a new theory, the repetition compulsion. Earlier he had considered the pleasure principle to be the governing drive in unconscious behavior, but now he placed the repetition compulsion "beyond the pleasure principle." The child who relives with her dolls the frightening fights her parents are waging daily is attempting to master disturbing reality by stage-managing it. The fact that the fights remain acrimonious even in play doesn't matter; what's important is that the child, rather than being a passive observer, is now manipulating what threatens her.

The repetition compulsion seems an elegant model for sadomasochism, in which both partners, functioning under the benign dispensation of make-believe, re-enact not their own private troubles but rather our society's nightmarish preoccupations with power, with might. No acute person can fail to respond to the gross economic exploitation, the subtle oppression, the alienation and inauthenticity of modern life. Even if we insulate ourselves behind minute personal ditherings and distractions, we are still haunted by the arrival of the ghost at the banquet. Everywhere we see the results of racial bias, of sexism, of a self-perpetuating power elite. The same scramble after status rages through the family, the university, the corporation. Even those who have made

Better Than Any Pusher



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it to the top know how precarious their perch is. And old age brings all careers to an ignominious end. No one is safe—ever, anywhere.

This miserable reality, fueled by greed, fear and intimidation, is so real we cannot bear to look at it; as Simone Weil put it, "Unless protected by an armor of lies, man cannot endure might without suffering a blow in the depth of his soul." Most Americans today dismiss social problems as "dull" or drop a tired curtsy toward such issues in the form of a quip or rueful joke. Endless jokes—yet never a sober word about the scandal of power that ruins our sleep.

These hidden maneuvers after money and status are revealed in sadomasochism. Whereas ordinary social interactions are characterized by the *joke*, humor has always been inimical to sadism, just as light is to vampires. This humor that defuses outrage (no matter how justified) and dampens indignation (no matter how righteous) is just another name for surrender. Sadomasochism rejects the laugh that paralyzes social conscience. Within the charged space surrounding the master and his slave, true deeds are performed. One man does submit to another. One man does humiliate another. The same relief we experience in watching a Shakespeare play, the relief of participating in action devoid of irony and freighted with clear values, is the release offered to the sadist and masochist. The couple performs the mysteries of domination, of might, that obsess our culture. As Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have said in *Anti-Oedipus*, "Class struggle goes to the heart of desire." For these writers there is no distinction between psychic and money economy, between the libido and other forms of energy; nor are domestic dramas, the agonies of the Oedipus complex, divorced from the larger social struggles outside the home. Unlike the Freudians, Deleuze and Guattari would not believe the Germans worshipped Hitler because they were afraid of their fathers. Quite the reverse. They feared Dad because he expressed and passed on the totalitarianism of his society. And this fear is invested with sexuality.

The anger and brutality that the child glimpses in his duplicitous parents, that the boss senses in his wisecracking employees, that the middle class attributes to working people—this anger and brutality are exorcized in S&M. Sex becomes an act born of the repetition compulsion, an Aristotelian drama with its unities of time, place and situation and its definition of character through action; the drama recapitulates the incoherent and far more frightening violence of our society. S&M has always surfaced at times when a crushing power structure is beginning to topple—at the end of the Roman Empire, at the outbreak of the French Revolution, and now. The unbearable suspense of awaiting revenge and resolution is reduced to the narrow limits of a sexual encounter. The fact that that encounter is by its very nature primarily linguistic allows it to tap the verbal reality of might; the sadist's commands and insults belong to the code of power ordinarily disguised by jokes. Instead of fencing with shadows, the sadomasochist encompasses in an hour a lifetime of pain and redemption. The dangers of class hatred are scaled down to the ritualized perils of the waif Justine, that career victim, and the lordly Count Bressac. Sadomasochism is a futile effort to reduce ubiquitous cruelty to the comprehensible scope of sex.

The violence resides almost entirely in the language. One man licking another's Frye boots would be hilarious were the act not labeled "humiliation"

If nothing else, this theory of sadism as a premonition of socialism has the virtue of already having been satirized. A character in Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, a sinister fellow named Thanatz, asks why our capitalist masters have taught us to feel shame whenever the subject of S&M comes up. "'Why will the Structure allow every other kind of sexual behavior but *that* one? Because submission and dominance are resources it needs for its very survival. They cannot be wasted in private sex. In *any* kind of sex. It needs our submission so that it may remain in power. It needs our lusts after dominance so that it can co-opt us into its own power game. There is no joy in it, only power. I tell you, if S and M could be established universally, at the family level, the State would wither away.'"

Even I can chuckle over that one. In fact, it would be absurd for me not to express my own misgivings about S&M. All too many leather men become so addicted to the scene that they won't venture into jobs or social situations where they can't wear their costumes; the fantasy of power has confined them to the gay ghetto. In order to continue inhabiting their waking dream they may become quite literally addicted to booze or drugs. The demands of sexual illusion speed many leather men on from one partner to another, though quite a few guys into S&M are able to sustain long-term relationships.

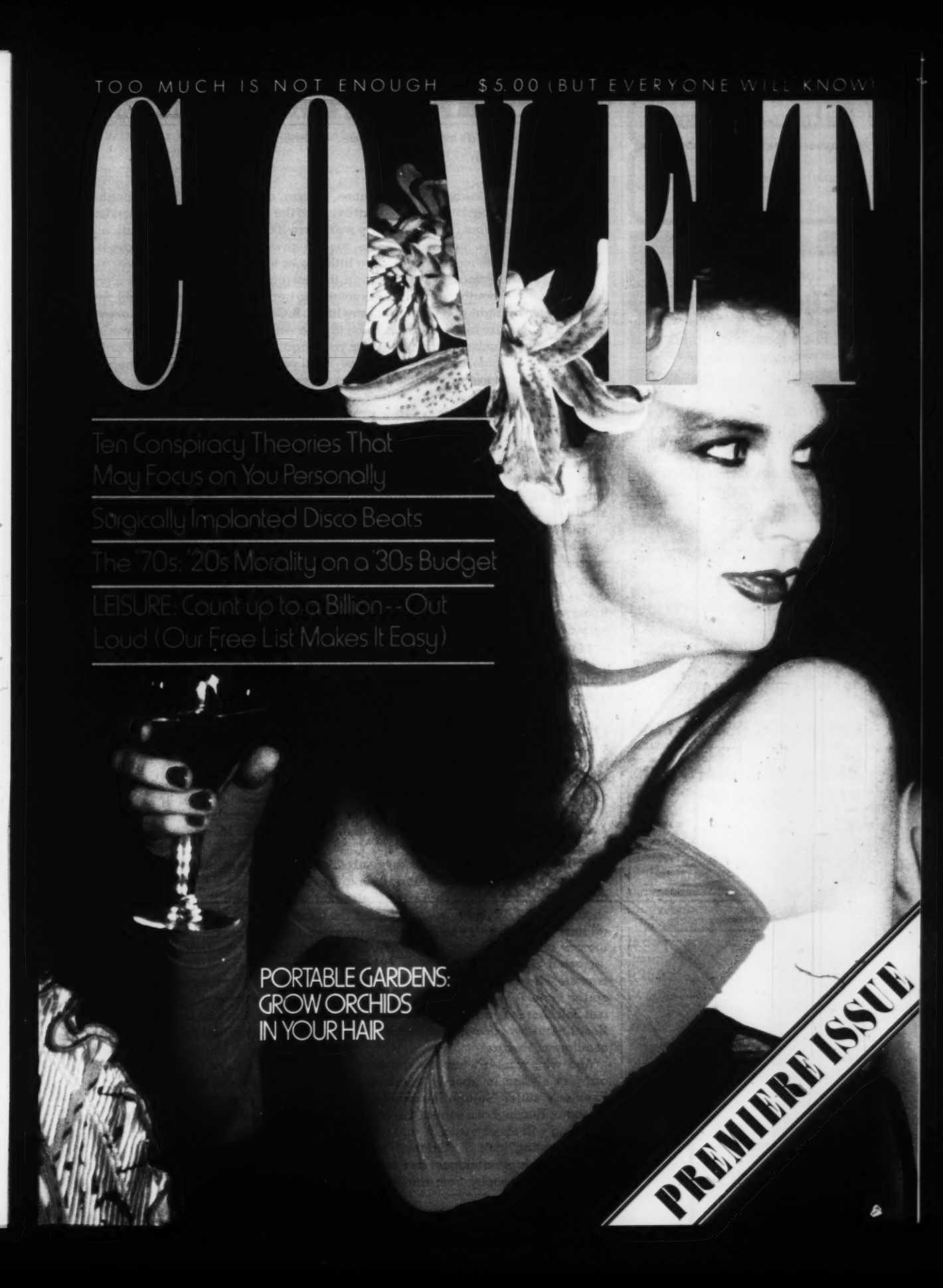
More seriously, Susan Sontag, in her essay on the Nazi film director Leni Riefenstahl, has said that the fantasy behind sadomasochism is death and that the Hitler years have provided the sadomasochist with "a master scenario available to everyone." Pasolini's last film, *Salò*, spells out the supposed relationship between S&M and Fascism in stomach-turning detail. Four petty tyrants in the last days of the Fascist regime round up a group of teenage girls and boys and confine them to a villa, where they are subjected to the horrors of coprophilia, torture and death. Throughout these gory and melancholy rites the imaginations of the sadists are fired by stories recited by aging female "narrators" done up in sequins and boas and given to melodramatic intonations and literary euphemisms. Almost always the sadists are dressed formally, and their revels take place not in dungeons at midnight but in cool, spacious rooms invaded by the clear light of day. The sounds of approaching warfare can be heard, but the sadists ignore their crumbling power and devote themselves to their ghastly rituals.

I was sickened by the film. Is this where S&M leads? Could it be that my fine theories might be justifying actual cruelty?

I think not. Hitler was not, I have heard, Eva Braun's master; he was not a sadist in bed. The concentration camps were not sexual playgrounds but scenes of real, not make-believe, genocide. Actual gay sadomasochism, as practiced by some of Ernst Roehm's followers, was exterminated by the Nazis; perhaps, to paraphrase Pynchon's Thanatz, submission and dominance were too important to the Nazis to be wasted in private sex. *Salò* is Pasolini's translation of Sade into contemporary terms, not a matter of historical fact. The film may even be an expression of Pasolini's gay self-hatred, the very factor that led him to pick up the straight boy who murdered him. In any event, the film is not the least bit sexy.

The confusion arises from our double use of the word sadism to mean both criminal, brutal acts of nonsexual violence and harmless erotic games. They are not the same thing. The obscenities of war are not equivalent to the eccentricities of the bedroom. Indeed, totalitarian regimes, whether on the Right or the Left, have always suppressed sexual deviations of every sort, including sadomasochism. Political oppression feeds on sexual repression; S&M is too anarchic to serve the designs of fascists.

"Go tell it to the Marines," you might well be saying by now, dear reader, *mon semblable, mon frère*—and so I would were the Marines not better acquainted with the real sadism of our society than either you or I could ever hope to be. ●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Nothing Becomes Fur Like Fur

COVET was conceived and written by Mark O'Donnell, who has never methodically slaughtered livestock as part of a bizarre midnight ritual.

Covet cover photograph by Lynn Karlin

TOWN TRAMPS OF THE GLOBAL VILLAGE

"The mind is the world's smallest boutique."—Pluteau St. Grisby

by Veneera del Grotto

Well, they're out! The latest census figures, I mean, and they indicate—though it's just a lot of numbers, mind you—that over half the population wears, or needs to wear, glasses! What an ugly country we'd have if that were *true*. My solution: Lower the standards. Increase type size, make highway signs bigger—I'd love it if all the seats at the movies were just a little closer to the screen...

Belgium's near-**Princess Cristina** is in the hospital again. Her dentists say she's having her mouth surgically restructured to improve her tennis stance. I've never been overnight in a hospital in my life...**R.C. Kohler** is using the money from his Nobel prize in Driver's Education to get a whole fleet of new cars. I won a lot of prizes at church camp, but that was years ago...Bedridden socialite **Diana Wheelan**'s last words, say intimates, were "I told you not to bring any of your ugly friends." I haven't even considered my last words yet...

I sneaked into Byzantium the other night—that new disco that only allows fair-haired children and dogs—and overheard one of the bartenders say, "A fool and his money are soon parted, but at least the money doesn't ask for alimony."...**Ariadne Adriata**'s next is a Come-As-You-Would-Be-Come-On-To party. Everybody comes dressed as the other guest they'd most like to know better. Ariadne's Pretend-It's-Methadone bash at the Y Rehabilitation Center (after hours, of course) was the friendliest night in recent memory, for those admitted...

THIS MONTH'S NOSTALGIA QUESTION: Who is the best-looking person I've ever slept with? (answer to last month's: No, but I had a urinary infection that worried me)...I didn't catch **Baron Happlewhite** among the rainbathers at Monte Carlo during the storm season this year—maybe he feels stupid now that the beachgoers have taken to wearing clothes...I did see actor **Roberts Roberts** taking a romantic tour of Central Park in a horse-drawn carriage—alone! Actor seized in one-man love nest! Just kidding, Robs, please don't do that cruel impersonation of me you do at parties, for revenge...

Dieting **Bimbaux Herringbone** never goes out to dine without her specially-trained dog Amnesty, who eats all her meals for her...**Katya** and **Virina Denzgartten** are inseparable casino cousins—they trade clothes, share recurring amnesia and, along with Katya's sister Lolli, are legally only one person... A couple in Astoria tried to adopt their television set. I guess they can't resist that big baleful eye...Window-shopping turned up these zingy trends: auto parts from actual accidents—the hot new motif in designing loft apartments...coffins with mirrors on the inside lid...interior fencing, for apartment-sharers... disposable fireplaces...surgically-implanted jewelry...

To all those dreary people I see still wearing refugee fashions: That barely-escaped-with-your-life look is *out*—where have you been? Mexico, judging from the looks of most of them...

REAL FASHION: "Let things like baseball and maternity *stagnate*. Let them go ahead and do their same old thing *over* and *over*. The world of fashion is *alive*—and always changing." That's the *dernier cri* from **Pluteau St. Grisby**, and he should know—Pluteau, who pioneered the famous "eternal haircut" (remember all those little *knots*?) and practically *invented* prenatal cosmetics, is known to most of us mere mortals as the *one* designer chosen by the United Nations to represent Western culture (boots and vests, I guess) in the recent 50,000 A.D. time capsule. Never one to rest on his laurels (nicely tapered as they are), Pluteau's spring lineup has *flattened* the Champs-Élysées with its sheer utter *daring*. How can Solzhenitsyn fault us for cowardice, when here is a man who *flaunts* conventional hemlines, *discards* old notions of color and contour, and redefines wit in semiformal apparel?

And who wouldn't happily flatten at the sight of Grisby's on-beyond-camp array of human incapacity in all its familiar flamboyance! Peasant regalia? Firemen's suits? Garage mechanics' jumpsuits? Obsolete and unfunny. Even Bimbaux Herringbone's great Burger-King-employee look has started to cloy. If anything will shock visually (and when you're a clotheshorse, how *else* can you be interesting?) it's St. Grisby's Less-Fortunate Chic, *the* look in simulated injury—yards of bandages, and mysterious, even unnameable illnesses.

Further philosophy from the Saint: "I refuse to listen when people say that

fashions nowadays are just like the thirties'. Our styles may look exactly the same, but we aren't, so even pure Art Deco is informed and chastened by World War II and Vietnam." What about the Korean War? "A little bit, in the hats."

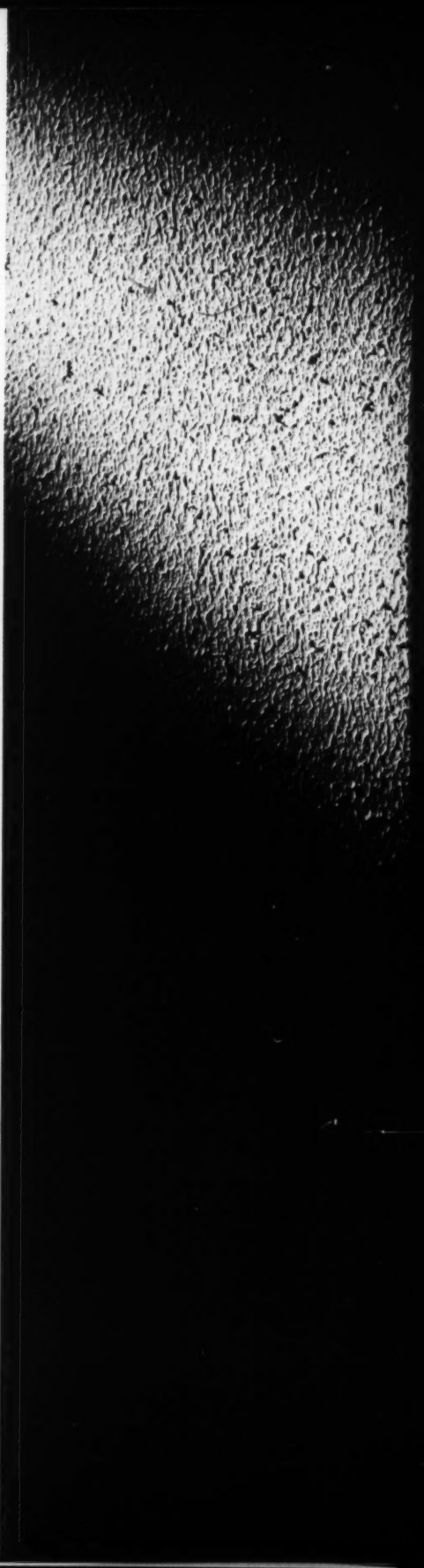
That *terrible infant* movie director, **Pablo Biddardoburg**, has announced that he will film a black-and-white remake of the 1938 classic *Bringing Up Baby*, with Katharine Hepburn and Cary Grant in the Katharine Hepburn-Cary Grant roles. Also in the works for Pablo: a remake of *Nothing Sacred*, using all the original footage... None of the critics have mentioned that the actors in the new film *Posteriors* aren't wearing clothes. They must be afraid for their jobs... *Parking Lots*, the photo exhibit at the Chutney, has inspired a spinoff TV series called *Abandoned Chevies*... The All-Black Nude Theatre of Deaf Women delayed the opening of its current workshop production, an updated *Under the Yum Yum Tree*. The police nixed their using actual guns onstage. In my day, actors didn't need to defend themselves... Everyone's high on *Food Court*, the new TV drama in which fictional chefs go to trial weekly to determine what turned beautiful meals into "bombs."

Richard Nussbaum made a big hit with shrinks for his Oscar acceptance speech: "You're aware only of *yourself* during orgasm!" It's true, if you concentrate on it as scientists do... *Us* magazine is getting a divorce... The President's Council on Truth has been reorganized and is now the President's Council on Credibility. Welcome aboard, Chief!... **Kevin Royal-Pudding** (real name: Kevin Corrigan), lead singer for the Dead Baby Jokes, said this about songs at our tête-à-tête at MuMu's: "We might use the Declaration of Independence for lyrics, but we could just as easily use the instructions from the Minute Rice box, or our bank statement, or just stand there waiting for the audience to offer us a cigarette." On last year's tour they read newspapers onstage, sometimes out loud... Conceptual and Largely Theoretical artist **Chrisco** accepts enormous checks from patrons and then *dimly alludes* to a work of art in exchange, but never specifically enough to determine if it exists or not. Can you insure something like that?...

Have you seen *Each Other*? It's the new magazine put out by special friends **Phil Willis** and **Danny DeNivea**. They take turns interviewing and photographing each other. First eight issues looked great!

A thought (just kidding) in closing: If your parents didn't know how to love you, so showered you with *things* instead, what better revenge than to not know how to love yourself, and to shower yourself with *things* instead? See you in line for the future! —V.d.G.

Illustration by Kit Grover



ZED SNOMAN

famous celebrity seeker

Zed (full name Zedward) Snoman (rhymes with "Roman," he emphasizes) has come within several feet of some of the greatest personalities of modern times. His face was co-featured with a stone coin from Yap on a recent cover of Things *magazine, and the editors of* Each Other *are considering letting him do a photo spread of the two of them, even though Zed is not a photographer. We talked to him at the home of an acquaintance with whom he has been staying for several months.*

COVET: Zed, you've wanted to be famous all your life, haven't you?
ZED: You sure are right. I can't put it any better than you just did. Will everything I say go in this article?
C: Yes. This new cassette converts it into cold type as you talk.
Z: Do I pay you, or do you pay me for this?
C: Watch it, your ice cream's about to drip.
Z: Your photographer is probably coming later, huh?
C: No, the cassette takes photos, too.
Z: Wow. Do a profile of it.
C (politely): Ha, ha.
Z: You mean you never have to, you know, write this up?
C: I interview a new top personality of the era every week. I don't have time for evaluation tea-party stuff.
Z: Easy job. Maybe I'll be a famous journalist.
C: You think so?
Z: I don't want to commit myself, especially if that thing puts it in print.
C: Well...has being on the cover of Things *magazine changed your life?*
Z: Not enough yet. I look in the mirror and it's still me.
C: You want to do great things, huh, Zed?
Z: Well, or to have done them.
C: I don't follow.
Z: I'd like people to know I'd done something great. The thing itself that's great I don't care so much about.
C: What direction do you think that thing will be in, Zed? Sports?
Z: Oh, come on. I hate sports. Athletes are so dumb. Come on, that's not fame.
C: What is fame, then, to you?
Z: It's everyone stammering when they tell me things. It's—if I walked into a shoe store and asked for dinner, they would get it.
C: Powerful, huh?
Z: No, loved, mostly.
C: Like a movie star?
Z: If I go into acting.
C: Or singing. Do you think the competition is unfair?
Z: Well, I do resent those sisters-of-stars and neighbors-of-presidents and survivors-of-plane-crashes, 'cause they didn't do anything to get known. Babies the Pope hugs, that makes me boil. At least assassins work a little. Not that I'll necessarily be an assassin.
C: Why "stardom," Zed?
Z: Well, I'd be a completed personality. People would know who I was.
C: Yes?
Z: And they could tell me.

THE COVET INTERVIEW

Photograph by Michael Tighe

A COVET SCRAPBOOK

Family of the Moment

Chosen for no particular reason—to spare our readers any sense of intimidation

We chose the Bolonna family of Moot Point, Maryland, to honor this month—to hurtle from anonymity to obscurity for a brilliant microsecond, like a man-made element, and then to rejoin their fellows' march to oblivion. What decided us? Probably this postscript on their contest application, written in Mrs. Bolonna's minute, docile hand: "Please do not notify us if we lose."

The official COVET portrait of the Family of the Moment. Missed the shot: Mr. Bolonna, who was at an officers' election for the Knights of the Hermetically Sealed Urn; Mrs. Bolonna, who was at an evening class in sandwich decorating; daughter Kim, who was away at school; son John Fitzgerald, whose whereabouts were unknown.

The family enjoys the modern services of Home Box Office Home, which beams another family's living room into their own, 24 hours a day. The viewing tends to get dull after midnight, but, Mrs. B. notes, "They had a prowler once."

Along with two friends, 13-year-old John Fitzgerald Bolonna is in a Rock rock group, and spends most of his time lying catatonic by roadsides or in gently flowing streams. (His sister Kim once went three years without speaking or moving, but that was because she'd read in a magazine it would increase her mystique.)

Photographs by Larry Williams

College junior Kim is into some wild student pastimes at Princeton. Gone are last year's innocent days of popping MSG tablets and going to Group Budgeting Parties. This year Kim and her friends get off on the latest high—bleeding to unconsciousness.

After flunking out of self-discovery class last year (her instructor cited her "inability to concentrate on herself in her sleep"), Mrs. Bolonna, undaunted, hired a private detective to report to her daily on her own whereabouts and actions. She doesn't speak to him, but mails his paychecks. "Getting to know him might confuse things," she says.

OPERATION SURVIVAL!

You're trapped in the wilderness without a mirror! What do you do?

by Katina Patina

First of all, don't panic. You can *let* your appearance slip a little, since no one else is around! But actually, Nature abounds in natural reflective surfaces. The pond, pool, lake or you-name-it body of water is and always has been the basic best for this. One hint: Puddles often collect in the open hollows of old dead trees, and there's very little of that annoying "ripple distortion" problem with these shallow, enclosed surfaces.

The corneas of the eyes of small, newly caught woodland creatures, especially if they're wide with fright, make very small mirrors, but there *are* two of them. Likewise, a glistening honeycomb, exposed to light, provides a brilliant if multi-faceted reflection that many consider worth the risk of dealing with thousands of angered bees. And don't forget the resources in your own backpack—a canteen, a messplate, even the back of a compass. They're adequate measures until you can get a more exact reading on how you look.

No blow-dryer either? No problem to the savvy woodsperson! A live bird, caught and held by the feet, will beat its wings with piteous but steady vigor, and that stream-soaked coif will be ready for action before nightfall!

Biggest drag of all: surrounded by all this scenic splendor and beauty *with no drugs*. It's like a dance without your high-stepping shoes. Still, you can expand on this scene by taking your belt (or a length of rope—campers always seem to have that) and tightening it gradually around your abdomen. You may see stars and whirling colors, and you'll definitely get faint and dizzy! And isn't that what the wide-open spaces are all about?

Photographs by Jere Cockrell

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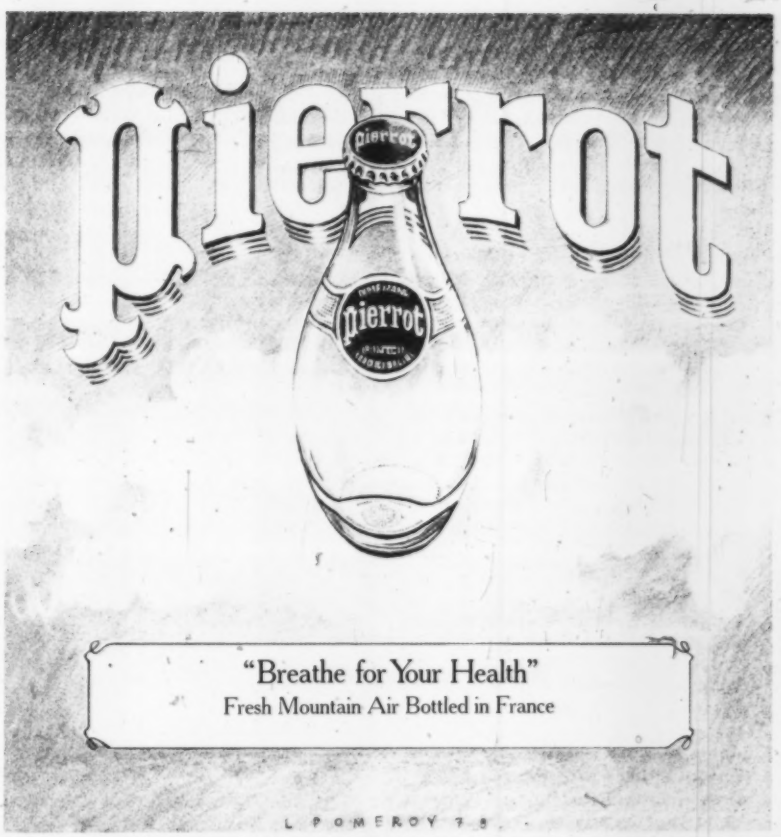

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Illustrations by Lisa Pomeroy, Rocco Albericio, Stephen Doyle

decadence

Trafficking in Innocence

The child as sex object

by Judith Coburn

In an ice cream bar in Saigon's Tenderloin, a hulking, moon-faced American soldier lounged at a corner table with a woman he had obviously bought for the afternoon. Like most Vietnamese women, she was tiny, doll-like, with the flat breasts and narrow hips of a child. For nearly an hour, he plied her with whipped-cream-smothered sundaes; the two never spoke. Finally, she got up and left. Outside, she gave her black silk trousers a businesslike hitch before wading into the afternoon traffic. I couldn't resist asking the G.I. if he'd had a nice time. "These girls, they're not like American women," he said approvingly. I asked if he found the language barrier difficult. "Oh, no," he answered. "I'd just as soon they didn't speak English."

Eight years later, as America's newest sexual obsession —sex with children— engulfs us, that scene hardly seems foreign. The G.I. wanted a woman he could lord over, a woman whose circumstances (her different culture, her economic need, her appearance) reduced her to a child in his eyes. He, like thousands of American men, was trafficking in innocence.

In the last year, sex with children has become a hot topic in popular American culture. Conservatives are putting incest, kiddie porn and child prostitution at the top of their outrage lists, while the sexual avant-garde wonders whether statutory rape laws shouldn't be abolished, since they violate children's rights to have sex. Soft-focus erotica of dewy-eyed pre-pubescents has opened the door to kiddie porn in magazines from *Playboy* to the hard-core *Moppets* and *Lollitots*. The lust for the pre-teen seductress in movies such as *Night Moves* and *Taxi Driver* climaxed last summer with the release of Louis Malle's elegy to child prostitution, *Pretty Baby*. Fueling the debate have been a score of legal cases involving sex between adults and children, including the sensational Roman Polanski rape case and the arrest of 24 "respectable" middle-class Boston-area men for running sex rings of runaway boys.

This new fashion could be dressed up, as it has been for centuries, with *bon mots* about the moral purity, tenderness and spontaneity of youth. Latter-day libertines sport a mundane justification: If it feels good, do it; get in touch with *all* your sensual feelings, don't get hung up on guilt, etc. In Boston, a kind of informal "pederast liberation movement" (controversial among gays and straights) takes it even further: The group is defending the men indicted in the boys-for-hire case, insisting that love, not money, was the primary currency of exchange. Civil libertarians are ambivalent: It's clear the government has no business intervening in private sex between consenting adults. But the two goals of the children's rights movement—one seeking to extend the rights of adults to children, the other aiming to preserve the protected status of minors—collide on the question of sex between adults and children.

Puritans and libertines have more in common on the issue of sex with children than you might think. Prudes obsessed by kiddie porn and the libertines in love with pretty babies are both motivated by real distaste for adult—specifically female—sexuality. Prudes are disgusted by sex altogether—that's clear. But psychologists are finding that campaigners for sexual license, especially lovers of children (boys or girls), harbor deep fears about adult sexuality and the intimacy that adults usually demand from their lovers. Like the patrons of porn shops and prostitutes, child-lovers express their hostility and fear of intimacy by objectifying and neutering their partners. Children are emotionally out of reach, which is both alluring and reas-

Judith Coburn's last article for New Times *was about sexism at* The New York Times.

suring to anyone frightened or repulsed by adult sexuality. They don't have developed breasts or genitals. A fantasy, a child, a magazine photo, a prostitute, are all more controllable than a mature woman. Nabokov even has Humbert objectify his own sex object, Lolita: "What I had madly possessed was not she, but my own creation, another fanciful Lolita—perhaps, more real than Lolita; overlapping, encasing her; floating between me and her, and having no will, no consciousness—indeed no life of her own."

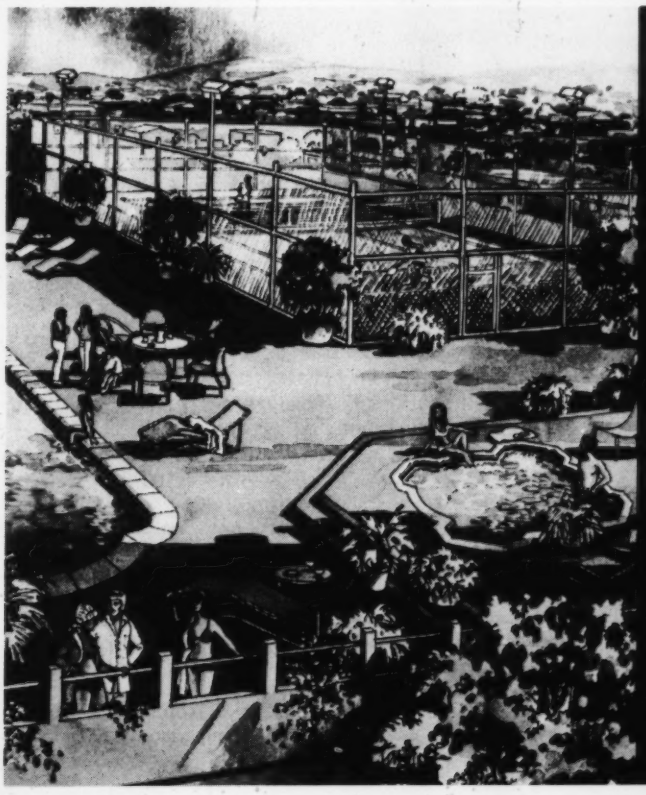
Psychologists believe that people favoring sex with children harbor fears of adult sexuality

The issue here is not the exploitation of innocence, or even of sex *per se*. The central issue is power, which cannot be separated from sex. Even in some utopian, guilt-free state of nature, it's doubtful sex would ever become just some healthy bodily function. By its physical nature alone, sex is fraught with issues of control and surrender; between an adult and a child, these overtones of power reach their extreme. Even for the most cynical sexual gymnast or the celibate, sex represents an act of vulnerability—a momentary loss of self—that can call up the deepest feelings of connection, transcendence or exploitation.

But sex, of course, cannot be isolated from the basic power relations in a society. In male-dominated America, sex is in the hands of men—who can control and wield power over women by denying a woman's sexuality altogether or by appropriating it for their own use. In this power-corrupted context, it's also impossible to imagine an equal relationship between a child and an adult—particularly since its most common configuration is that of an adult male, often a relative, with a female child. Children are inexperienced, easily impressed, malleable. A child often has sexual feelings that can be manipulated by an adult whom the child loves, fears or respects. A seductive child may not understand the implications of his or her own behavior; to a child, flirting may not be sexual, it may just be mimicking Mommy.

Not surprisingly, the debate over sex with children is innocent of the power question. Adults who think they should be able to have sex with children—often citing nationwide surveys showing that American children are reaching puberty and becoming sexually active at earlier ages—naturally have an investment in depicting these forms of sex as "victimless crimes." Louis Malle told writer Jon Cott that *Pretty Baby* involves "the fantasy of rape and violence, because a child is defenseless. It has to do with purity and innocence . . . with incest and also the impulse to destroy." Yet Malle went on to describe the movie as "a picture about child prostitution in which everybody else is the victim." As rape victims often are, Violet, the whorehouse's pre-teen "pretty baby," is presented as a seductress; it is she, then, not the men, who is responsible for anything that happens to her.

The current fascination with childish sexuality is yet another manifestation of the backlash against demands for women's equality. Like the brutality chic so popular three years ago and today's nostalgia for the traditional family, it is motivated by a determination to preserve men's free rein. The essence of decadence is lack of feeling. In sex, as in politics, decadence plays itself out as a refusal to involve or commit oneself. Questions of morality become too complex, or fail to entertain. But sex isn't just a game. Not immoral *per se*, the act itself can't be divorced from questions of morality. Baby love isn't mature love. And it isn't pretty, either. ●



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Mondo Americane

The preening of America

by Carol Caldwell

decadence

Fifteen years ago, we were treated to a Franco-Italian film called *The Seven Capital Sins*. Written in part by Eugene Ionesco, it was divided into seven segments graphically hyperbolizing pride, envy, lust, covetousness, anger, sloth and gluttony. Gluttony was the one that really sang. A multigenerational family of greasers was seen hunched over a funeral dinner sucking on *osso bucco*, engulfing gnocchis and sausage, slamming down spaghetti, slugging down cheap wine and popping grapes. It made Belushi's vacuum glide down the cafeteria lane in *Animal House* look like breakfast at Tiffany's.

And then—gluttonous maximus! An elegant pull-back revealed the entire neighborhood gorging and grunting as cats clawed through the pasta and gutters ran wild with grub. In order to keep cramming it down, the *populi* had to keep spitting it up. And as the long zoom-out continued, it encompassed the whole of Rome, stuffing and gushing, gagging and retching. Vomit and pasta flowed through the vias of Rome . . . of Italy, to the ultimate pull-back: the globe dripping—the earth as barf-bag of the universe.

Here in the New World, however, excess consumption has little to do with eating. To be sure, we thrilled as Craig Claiborne supped on a $4,000 dinner compliments of American Express. But that was less honest-to-God gluttony than it was *haute* fodder for *People* magazine. In the slender seventies, we eat right to stay fit. "I'll have the single slab of sole with six capers, three sticks of cold asparagus vinaigrette, a romaine leaf with soy and lemon and a glass of Perrier with a twist of lime." Euell Gibbonists across the country hunker down crunching nuts and berries, tree bark and sprout sandwiches. You can pay $500 a day to be starved and whipped into shape at spas like the Greenhouse and the Golden Door. Nobody's gourmand any more, everybody's *cuisine minceur* gourmet. A nation of lightweights.

We can no longer even queue up at *cuisine rapide* without being assaulted by "The Waistcincher," "The Slim Platter " or "Dieter's Deelite," each bastardizing the great American hamburger into some bunless wonder. The very staple of our age, the TV dinner, has gone anti-glut with Weight Watchers' selections (another leisure service of Weight Watchers International, Inc., $40 million in the first three quarters of fiscal '78). A chicken in every pot's been replaced by the people's right to saccharin.

Copernicus was wrong. Other heavenly bodies revolve not around the sun, but around our own celestial sphere. Egocentrism has been refined beyond the nebulous psychological self-help of the early Me Decade into the more visibly rewarding physical crusade of today. The body is the temple of our times.

With his keen appreciation for excess of any stripe, the man to shoot this epic American fleshflick would be, of course, Fellini. The maestro could fade up on a satellite shot of the continent, then zoom in to the byways of America glutted with body shops and saunas. Cut to wide-angle "before" shots of flabby hausfraus Nautilusing their way to new thighs, new highs, new guys. Insert quick cuts of beaming California couples in Jacuzzis, intertwined appendages whirlpooled to a frenzy. Long, lingering shots romancing the delectable American corpus as it is yogaed, aerobicked, modern-danced, manicured, pedicured, massaged, steamed, facialed and expunged of unsightly cellulite. Sound effects throughout: the blistering throb of a million jogging feet. . . .

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Carol Caldwell began eating at a very early age.

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ROLODEX RUDY

Avoiding swank parties and relentlessly working the telephone, *Washington Post* gossip columnist Rudy Maxa has become D.C.'s pre-eminent peeping Tom

by Mark Baker

decadence

The Washington Post newsroom is an open plain of white desks shimmering under bright fluorescent lights. Crowded into neat rows behind those desks, some of America's most respected journalists go about their business, serious business. One reporter telephones the personal emissary of the Shah of Iran. Someone else asks a Treasury official animated questions about arcane matters of fiscal policy. At another desk the conversation seems to concern the CIA.

Past the reporters' lockers and down the hall is a second, smaller newsroom, calm and uncluttered. Rudy Maxa works here. He is a *Washington Post* reporter, too. But his phone calls are . . . different.

On the line with him now is Joan Hitchcock, one of the less publicized self-proclaimed lovers of John F. Kennedy. She's on her fifth honeymoon, recently married to a clone of JFK who stars in the road show *JFK Lives*. Maxa wants the newlyweds to know that soon he will break the story of their secret marriage. Joan is pleased.

"How are you two getting along?" Maxa asks.

"I'm just as nasty to him as I was to Jack," she replies.

He feeds her another straight line: "Well, at least he doesn't have a bad back."

"Oh, Jack always complained about a bad back, but it didn't seem to slow him down too much when it counted."

Rudy Maxa smiles. It will make a good story for him—better than the item he ran about whom Sylvester Stallone was squiring around Washington. ("That wasn't Mrs. Stallone, it was an 18-year-old Annandale model. . . .") Not so good as the item about the California study showing that "politicians often have deep-seated masochistic impulses." These stories of his have appeared in Washington's newspaper of record, and it makes you wonder: What kind of reporter is this guy, and what is he doing at *The Washington Post*?

Maxa is D.C.'s political peeping Tom, the chronicler of what goes on behind closed doors. He jerked the bedsheets off Wayne Hays and Elizabeth Ray and exposed Glenn "Dare to Be Great" Turner, topping the master con man's phony investment pyramid. Maxa is the one who revealed White House aide Ham Jordan's loutish drinking etiquette—that infamous mouthful of Amaretto spewed down an

Photograph by Dorothy Tanous

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anonymous cleavage. In his "Front Page People" column in the *Post*'s Sunday magazine, Maxa reveals embarrassing inside information on the powerful and the profligate, culled from bimbos, gumshoes, snoops, spies . . . and other government employees.

Maxa's kind of reporting is called "hard gossip." It's a seventies hybrid, a cross between Hedda Hopper and Sy Hersh. As Maxa sees it, his brand of reporting has its advantages: "With 'hard gossip' I can have it both ways. The delicious dirtiness of gossip and the respectability of being a reporter.

"The strict definition of gossip is unverified rumor. That's not good enough for me. I'm bound by the same rules as every other reporter at *The Washington Post*: a minimum of two sources on every item, call for comment no matter how uncomfortable it may be. I don't feel particularly smarmy about what I do."

Journalists tend to regard gossip as a bastard strain of their profession, but Maxa's kind of gossip is not so easy for them to disown. In four years as a *Post* columnist, Maxa has won his share of professional recognition. For example, he received the John Hancock Award for Excellence in Business and Financial Journalism for his reporting of the Glenn Turner racket. On the Hays/Ray story—which saw Maxa and colleague Marion Clark stake out Liz Ray's office for six weeks to confirm her charges—he missed a Pulitzer by only one vote.

In his years as a Washington gossip, Maxa has had to eat only one retraction. On the word of Dino, the proprietor of a small Italian restaurant in his neighborhood, Maxa reported that Jimmy Carter had lunched with George McGovern and had left a more-than-generous $100 tip. Intent on beating the daily gossips to print with the item, Maxa didn't confirm the story with the White House. Dino had lied; there was no $100 tip, not even a Carter/McGovern lunch. Maxa admitted in his column several months later that he had "acted unprofessionally."

Some would say it wasn't the only time. After the Jordan spitting incident, Maxa says, presidential press secretary Jody Powell called up to chew him out. "You make your living ruining other people's reputations whenever you get the chance," Powell said. "How can you sleep at night?"

Maxa doesn't look like a menace to society; he is more Mouseketeer than ferret, more cherub than vulture. Twenty-nine years old and he still looks like a child's doll: wispy blond hair above a high, smooth forehead; those full, crab-

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Mark Baker is executive editor of Forum *magazine. This is his first piece for* New Times *and we can assure you it will be his last.*

apple kid's cheeks that old ladies love to pinch so much; a rosebud smile painted on by Norman Rockwell in the early 1950s.

When Maxa started working at the *Post*, right out of college at the age of 21, he was variously known as "The Sprout" and "The Kid." He was green; he *knew* every other reporter on the paper had more sources than he did. Slowly, but

Maxa's brand of reporting is a cross between Hedda Hopper and Sy Hersh

with calculation, Maxa began cultivating contacts. Whenever he saw a name in the paper that interested him, he'd look the person up and try to establish some common ground for a talk. It helps that Maxa will listen to anybody—budding socialites with recipes, senile old ladies confessing to adultery with FDR, obvious crazies with UFO reports. "I met a lot of lowlifes, since they were the easiest to get to," he remembers.

Maxa estimates that he has more sources now, in more different areas, than any other reporter at the *Post*. His sources are really the force behind the creation of the column. Most of the tips he received didn't lead to magazine pieces, so he would route them to appropriate sections of the paper—the Metro Desk, the Style Section, the Business Section or the International Desk.

But they were hardly ever picked up, and he couldn't understand why. As he became more politically sophisticated about the workings of the *Post*, he realized that unless it was a very hot story, his colleagues saw his tips as an invasion of their turf. His help wasn't particularly needed.

So he went to Shelby Coffey, then the editor of the Sunday magazine, and suggested the magazine use Maxa's tips in a gossip column.

The telephone is a gossip columnist's bread and butter. It tells Maxa things that other people don't know, so that he can tell the world. His telephone is the only one in the *Post* magazine offices with a shoulder rest. "I can't wait till we get Touch-Tone," he says exuberantly as he twirls his Rolodex. "When we get Touch-Tone, we can dial long-distance *direct*. God, I love the phone."

More often than not, the stories find him. "You can't dig for the dirt," Maxa says, watching the flashing lights on the telephone with relish, "because you don't know where to start digging. It has to come to you. People in Washington know how to deal with the media. They're very up-front: 'I'm not going to

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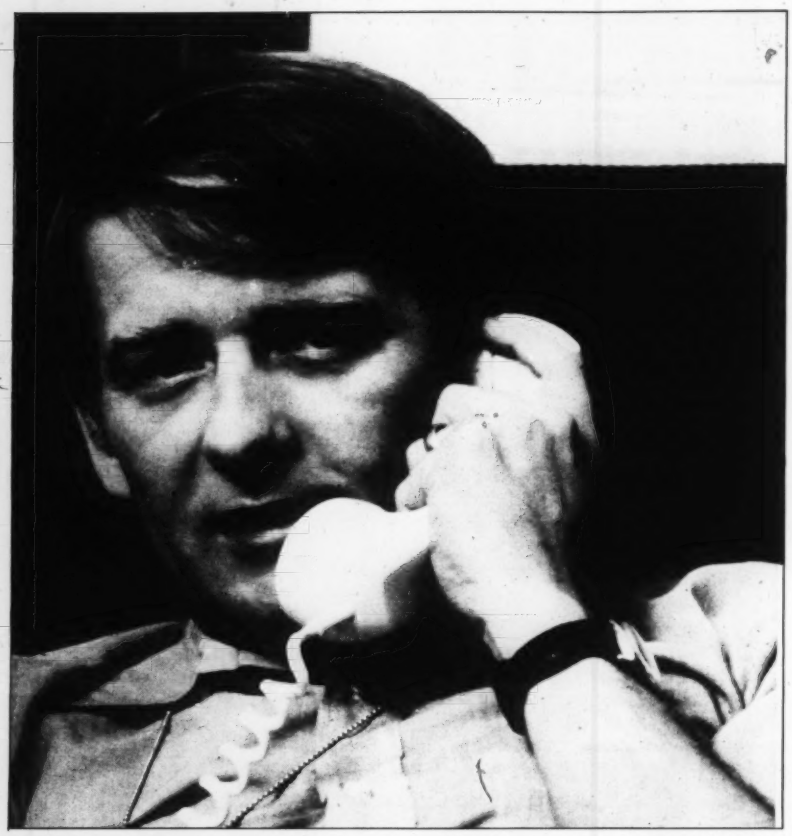

Gall The President's Men: Maxa angered White House staffers with his report that Hamilton Jordan spat a mouthful of Amaretto down a woman's blouse. Press secretary Jody Powell (above) called to accuse Maxa of "ruining other people's reputations whenever you get the chance"

tell you my name. Just listen.' Then they spill the juice, right in the old ear."

The woman on the phone now is a fiftyish German-American woman who leads a quiet, cornerstone-of-the-church existence in suburban Arlington, Virginia. She has been speaking with Maxa about once a week for the last year. Today, she is worried that the FBI will try to kill her.

While Maxa tries to calm her heavily accented hysteria, he runs her bizarre tale through his mind one more time. She claims that in the late sixties the FBI, in league with the Arlington police, persuaded her to convert her legitimate health spa into a full-fledged friction-enriched massage parlor. The FBI told her, she maintains, that they needed to know more about the sexual proclivities of the captains, crewmen and cabinboys of the Ship of State in order to better protect the national security. According to her stories, maybe they were right. There was the well-known congressman who just wanted to "watch" while a black-stockinged chippie danced around, a rose firmly clenched in her sphincter. The jar of jelly always handy in the parlor fridge, just for the Secretary who liked Welch's Grape Fellatio. The blindfolds and black limousine for the take-out order at . . . you guessed it, the White House. For two hours, off and on, a woman dressed in only a black cocktail dress was spanked by President Lyndon Baines Johnson.

Why the hell does Maxa listen to such cockamamie stories?

Watergate Babylon helped make the capital a much more lucrative ground for a gossip columnist

First of all, not every crazy story is crazy. During the last year, Maxa has uncovered an FBI memo commending the lady in Arlington as a reliable Bureau source. Six months ago, he wired her with a tape recorder for a meeting with her old police department contact, the man who did the bugging at the massage parlor. Much of her story was confirmed.

The New York Times thought enough of the lead to send reporter Howell Raines to investigate, and the FBI has called the woman's lawyer twice in the last two days. That's the essence of her tearful report to Maxa.

He eases her off the phone and calls the Arlington police contact. The officer has tapes in his basement of telephone conversations recorded at the parlor. Once Maxa gets his ear on those, the next step will be to question a retired FBI agent who worked on the project.

J. Edgar Hoover used to enjoy entertaining presidents with smutty stories from his "private files." There are some indications that this massage parlor in Arlington was one of the places the smut was raked up.

Which brings up the second reason for listening to ex-madams from the suburbs: It's a good story. The American people love a dirty story just as much as their presidents enjoyed Hoover's secretly documented porn.

When Maxa and Clark wrote the Hays/Ray exposé, they didn't think it would have any impact outside of Washington and Hays's home district. Presumably there are much bigger scams going down in D.C. The Pentagon could spend Liz's salary just changing office numbers. But Wayne and Liz were a hit all across America.

"There are myths that all Americans hold in common," Maxa says. "Among them are the beliefs that there is a light bulb that will last for 40 years, but they won't tell us about it because they'll lose sales; that we could really get 100 miles to a gallon of gasoline if Detroit would just use that secret engine they've been covering up; that every congressman has a dumb blonde on his staff that he just uses for sex. When that last myth stood up and said, 'Hi, I'm the dumb blonde and I'm here just for sex and I'm paid by you taxpayers,' it had a hell of an effect."

Henry Allen, the *Washington Post* reporter who worked at a desk adjacent to Maxa's for five years, attributes Maxa's success to this gift for hitting the public's hot button. "Rudy takes delight in the story for the story's sake," Allen says. "And he likes to write about what people like to read about. He has absolutely no shame. He'll ask anybody anything. I wouldn't say he's amoral; he's nonmoral. Rudy is what all the Scientologists want to be. He's one of the total hustlers."

In the space marked "Special Interests" on his employment application, Maxa wrote "con men, hustlers and rogues." He's always been fascinated by con artists, and hustling has been second nature to him since his youth. When he was in the eighth grade his parents sent him to a Naval Academy prep school. He hated it, but he made his way. "I used to sell dirty books," he

Photograph by Dennis Brack/Black Star

admits. "It was an all-boys school, and the older guys had a love for pornography. But they all knew shame, so they couldn't bring themselves to go downtown and buy dirty books."

Having led a particularly innocent childhood, Maxa's first literary love was *Mad* magazine. He was only dimly aware of what his porno business was about, even after he read some of his inventory. "I had no shame. I'd go downtown, buy the books and sell them at the school for twice the price."

One of the arguments he used to persuade his parents to take him out of private school was that the place was *filthy* with pornography.

Lunch at the Palm Restaurant. Maxa sometimes has two or three lunches a day. Lunchtime is gossip time. (He first heard Liz Ray's story of unbridled passion over lunch at Stouffer's.)

The maitre d' waves away Maxa's apologies for not having a reservation and entreats him to leave his sports jacket off as he guides us to a table in the rear, where Maxa can get his back against the wall and his eyes on the room. A gossip columnist can be very good for business. After Maxa's report of the Ham Jordan spitting incident, Sarfield's—the bar that was the scene of the "crime"—was packed with customers night after night. Tour buses slowed down as they passed the place. "You couldn't get Amaretto in this town," Maxa beams. "I didn't have the courage to go to Sarfield's to see if they were spitting it on each other."

Maxa looks into every face in the Palm. I ask who's here. "Just a bunch of junior partners," he says. "On a good day, I can catch a publisher here down from New York and get sneered at by John Mitchell."

In the space marked "Special Interests" on his employment application, Maxa wrote "con men, hustlers and rogues"

The gossip columnist picks his lunch spot by what kind of mood he's in—not what kind of *food* he's in the mood for, but what kind of *people*. The Palm is for heavy hitters, senior diplomats, high-ranking officials and the upper crust of Washington society. Duke Zeibert's is D.C.'s macho eatery—lawyers and sports reporters. Sometimes Duke himself will drop a few items that he shouldn't. Each restaurant has its own specific clientele, and Maxa knows them all. But any joint will do as long as there are people there putting in what Maxa calls "face time."

He customarily "works the room," table-hopping from group to group, shaking hands, stroking potential sources, leaning close to a red-lipsticked mouth to accept a peck on the cheek or a few whispered words in his ear. Today, he indulges in a little gossip-trading with the owners of the Palm. He tells them that Jimmy Connors, who is in town for a tennis tournament, was stood up last night for the second time by the disco lady who spins records at a local bar.

They smile appreciatively and then hand over their latest. It's something Maxa has already heard, researched and dismissed as unsubstantiated.

Maxa sees gossip as a natural extension of Washington's economic life, part of the capitalist system. "There are two industries in this town," he says: "government, and the press that follows it. All you have to trade on here is information. What you know and whom you know is your only currency. I can't tell you how many times I've sat in restaurants and listened to two people trading information. Ego points being racked up on each side of the table as each one lays out yet another card. It's just talk. Talk, talk, talk."

It's not a good day for tattlers at the Palm, but Maxa's not worried. He takes

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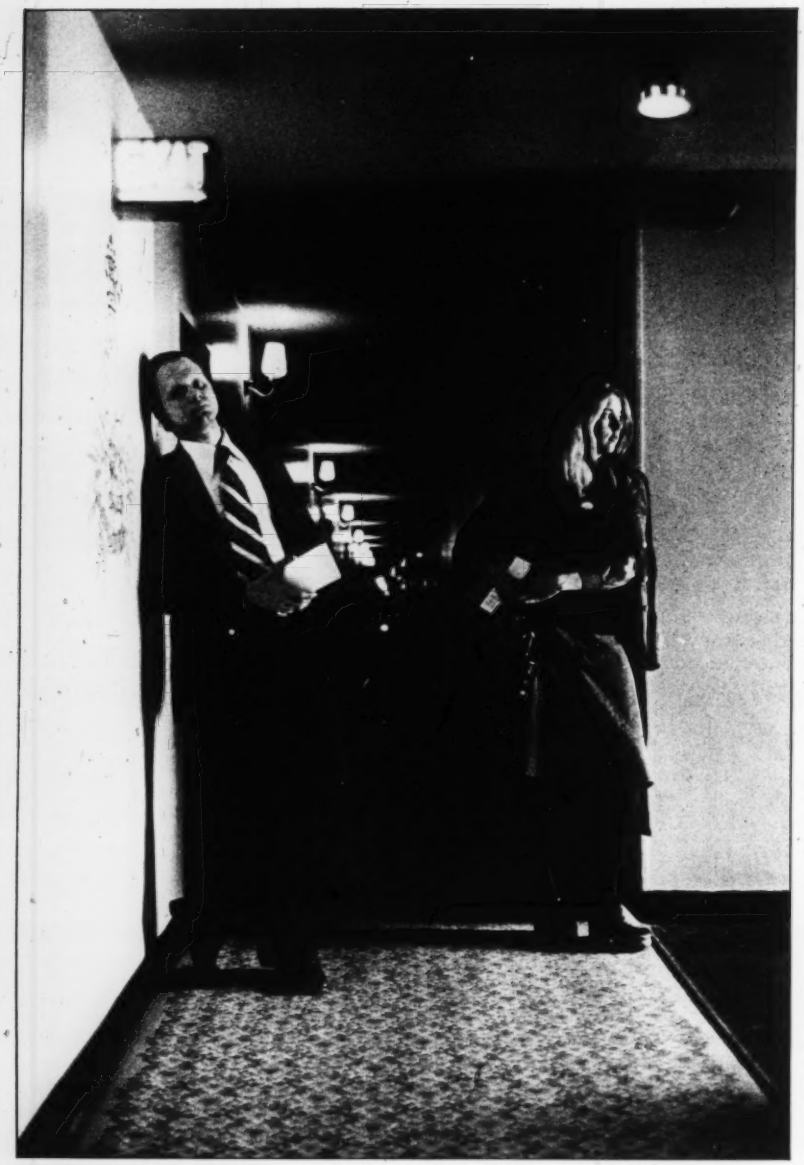


The Gossip As Gumshoe: To nail Wayne Hays, Maxa and Marion Clark spent weeks staking out locations around Washington

off his glasses and lays them on the table, since there isn't much to see anyway. "You've got 535 members of Congress. No matter what, you're guaranteed that once a month, one of those 535 is going to make a buffoon of himself somehow. Besides, there are always enough people acting like human beings to fill a column."

Watergate Babylon, and the resulting invasion of Washington by Hollywood, made the capital a much more lucrative ground for a gossip columnist. "First of all," Maxa says with his mouth full of shrimp, "Deep Throat wasn't in the basement telling Woodward exactly where to find the bodies. He was just gossiping, handing out blind items. America then discovered—and later went out and bought the books of—a much larger cast of characters than anybody ever thought existed in Washington. Suddenly we had John Dean with his crisp Mo-Dean wife behind him on TV every day. We *became* Hollywood."

Maxa launches into the tale of a food fight between Dustin Hoffman and a couple of the Kennedy kids that started one night by mutual agreement at a restaurant named Clyde's. The management put up with a bottle of ketchup or two. When the game escalated to special mixtures individually prepared in the kitchen by the combatants, the jig was up. "They kicked the Kennedys out," Maxa smiles. "But they let Hoffman stay."

Maxa signals for the check. "People in the public spotlight work very hard, and usually pay somebody a lot of money to make them look flawless," he says. "They're begging to give up their privacy in order to insinuate themselves into the fabric of our day-to-day lives. If they want to order themselves up on the public platter, let's eat." He pauses, then adds, by way of apology, "I never said that before."

Maxa grabs his glasses from the table and shoves them on his face. Staring intently toward the exit, he murmurs, "What's wrong with this picture?" In other words, why is that tall, blonde bombshell leaving with that short, fat greaseball in a loud plaid jacket?

Maxa has some questions for his old friend Dick Bast, Private Eye. We drive out to Bast's house in the exclusive suburb of McLean, Virginia. Bast is one of Maxa's heroes. "If I'd put Dick on the Hays/Ray case," he says, "you'd have color videotapes of them to play on your television."

Bast answers the door looking like a Raymond Chandler antihero, minus the rumples. He talks like one, too. Pointing to a tiger skin hanging on the wall of his den, Bast says, "Bagged that one with my wallet." That's what he always says.

As we relax over iced tea in the study, Bast recalls his first meeting with Maxa. "He seemed like an eager kid who wanted to do some good. So I gave him the best advice available in this town: Always assume that everybody in the government is lying to you until they prove otherwise." Bast hates government and is sworn to protect anyone—anyone—who gets run over by it.

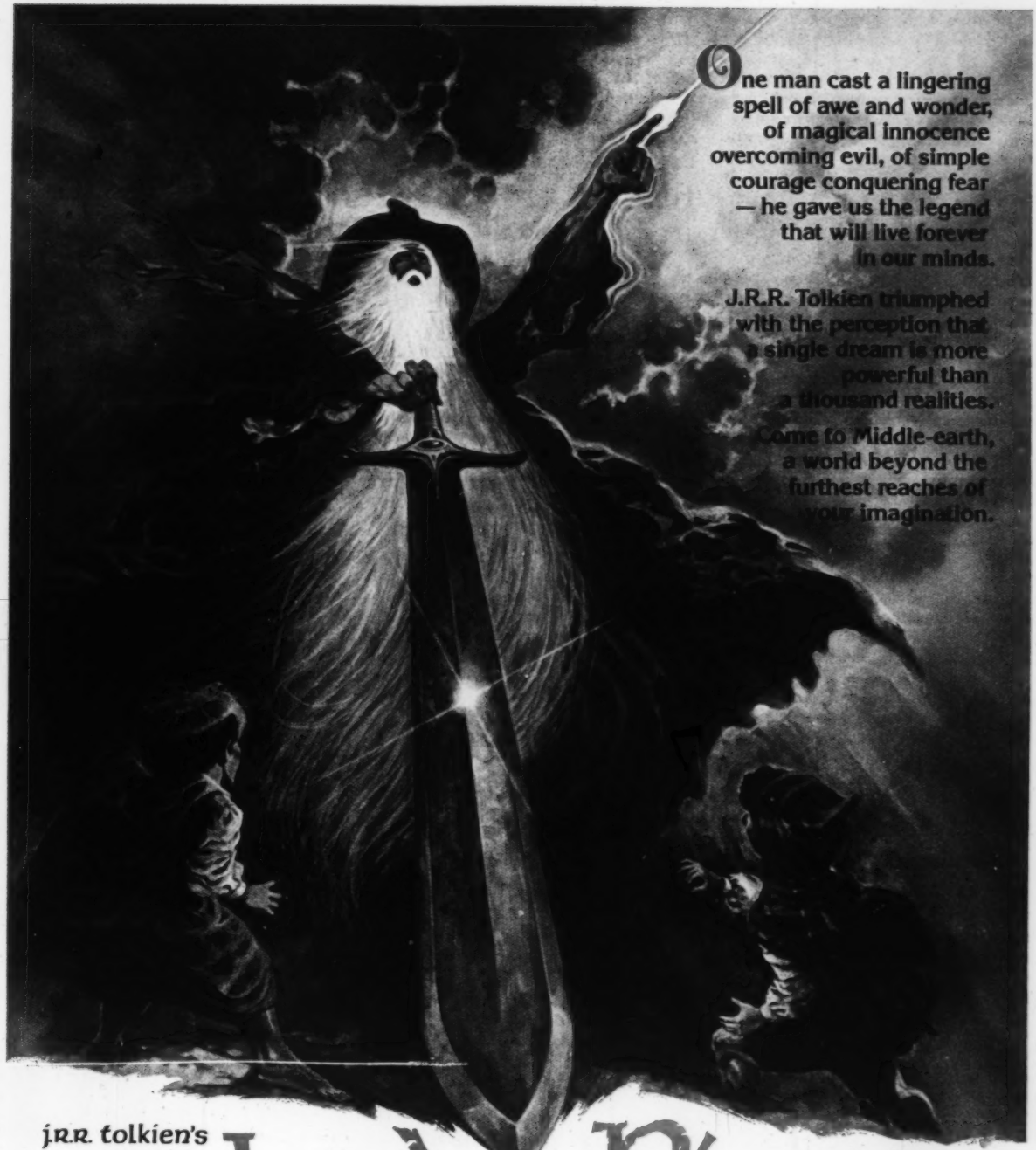
Although Maxa isn't exactly the Robin Hood of Connecticut Avenue, he shares Bast's contempt for the abuse of power. Maxa is fond of quoting a Robert Lowell line: "The elect, the elected, they arrive as shiny as dimes and leave soft and disheveled." How a person gets "soft and disheveled" is the real story of Washington for Maxa. The small, insidious daily abuses of power bother him more than the Big Issues most journal-

"He has absolutely no shame. He'll ask anybody anything"

ists worry over.

"For example, someone on the White House staff," Maxa smirks, "by the name of Jody Powell, got a $115,000 loan to buy a house in Washington without making a down payment on the property. Now, you or I couldn't buy a house without putting $20,000, $30,000 down. Because he's the President's man, he could. That's more a telltale sign of

Photography by Betsy Frampton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power than what stand some senator took yesterday on the energy legislation."

After a brief exchange of information concerning their respective active cases, Maxa cajoles Bast into reminiscing about old times—the Barbara Howar divorce case, for instance.

"Show him the pictures, Dick, if you still have them," Maxa urges. Bast rummages through his safe, chuckling as he tells the story.

He says he preceded Howar to a rendezvous with her lover at a posh hotel in Montego Bay, Jamaica, in 1964. After paying off the local security with a live cow, he bugged Howar's room and sat back to wait.

"I waited," Bast growls gleefully, "until they'd finished screwing and were just drifting off to sleep. Then I busted the door down and the photographer took pictures with a flash camera."

He hands me a black-and-white glossy. The woman on the bed has the sheet drawn tightly up against her chin, her mouth dropped wide in a silent scream. The man, sitting on the edge of the bed in crumpled pajamas, has his arm raised as if to ward off a blow. The whites are showing all around his eyes. It's a scary picture. Bast and Maxa are a little scary, too. They have matching twinkles in their eyes.

There is something of Dick Bast in Maxa—the curiosity, the need to know that is a prerequisite for detective work. Maxa has never assigned Bast to investigate a story for the *Post*, and he doesn't condone Bast's actions in this case. He just mentions that he is in no position to be judgmental, having listened in—albeit with her permission—on Liz Ray's intimate telephone conversations with Wayne Hays.

Dr. Amitai Etzioni, professor of sociology at Columbia University, says gossip is a social-control mechanism, a cousin of common law. Inappropriate behavior within a community is held in check by peer pressure in the form of gossip.

"In periods like we are presently experiencing in America," Etzioni says, "when the social fabric is coming apart and the other mechanisms for making people behave are not working, gossip becomes intensified. For instance, many individual congressmen act without any scruples. They get away with murder every day; sexual exploitation, ethnic parochialism, nepotism are rampant in America. If it wasn't for gossip as an external force, they would rip off the society completely."

The gossip columnist as sanitary engineer. Maybe there's something to the theory; certainly Maxa has a passion for order and cleanliness, even down to his personal habits. He considers his desk at the *Post* messy if the scissors *inside* the drawer aren't perpendicular to the front of the desk. Inobtrusively he empties ashtrays around the office. One office mate says Maxa gets upset when people drop newspaper sections on the floor as they finish reading them. During Maxa's college days, fellow editors at the Ohio University *Post* became so frustrated with his neatness fetish that they ran pizzas through his typewriter when he wasn't around, or poured bottles of rubber cement on his chair and set it afire.

"Gossip is part of a gradual trend to humanize the newsmakers, which I think is healthy"

The last of his phone calls taken care of, Maxa is through for the day. Now it's time for a white-tie reception at an embassy, or a cocktail party at Tip O'Neill's house. Right?

Wrong. We're going to a birthday party for a friend of Maxa's 2½-year-old daughter, Sarah. There will be one celebrity there: Spiderman is supposed to show.

When Maxa first started the column, he attended many parties. Then he discovered two things: First, most of the parties are boring. Second, he wasn't going to trip over Henry Kissinger having an affair at an Iranian Embassy function. "Besides, I prefer spending my evenings at home with my family." He keeps a listed phone number specifically so people can call him at home at night.

The Prince Charming of Gossip doesn't mingle much with the rest of the Court. Instead, Maxa talks with a lot of cabbies and waitresses, bartenders, secretaries and assistant staff assistants.

"The myth about this whole thing is that important people give you gossip items," he says. "The *important* contacts are those middle-level kind of people who have access to the weird stuff and want to stab somebody in the back."

One section of Maxa's column is called "Suspicions." It's reader participation; the public is invited to send in questions that have answers. Every day, Maxa receives poison-pen letters about the personal lives of public and not-so-public figures. Most of his correspondents claim to be motivated by concern for "the good of the country." Over the years, Maxa has found that it's more likely the writer is just angry that someone beat him to a promotion. Sometimes it's sexual jealousy.

The letters Maxa receives for "Suspicions" usually run something like this: Isn't it true that Congressman Such-and-Such, whose wife is in a mental institution, is having an affair with So-and-So?

"If you fill in the blanks correctly," Maxa says, "that particular item is, in fact, true. But it's so personal, it's not violating any laws, it's not costing the public any money, so it's just not any of my business. I'm not some wild-eyed maniac who'll print anything."

Then why did Maxa expose Ham Jordan's conduct in a bar? Even if Jordan spit a drink on a woman, or wrote dirty limericks on a napkin, it wasn't exactly against the law. It doesn't cost the taxpayers anything. Was Maxa's story just a pot-shot aimed in the general direction of the presidency? Some of Maxa's fellow reporters at the *Post* attacked him for that piece.

"The President led with his chin," Maxa rebuts. "He was Mr. Reunite-The-Family, Mr. Put-God-Back-Into-Government. So if you find someone in his Administration who is drinking heavily or acting in a boorish manner, it's news. Because of the image he presented on the campaign trail and continues to present, he should be called to task when events within his own house contradict that persona." (On the other hand, Maxa knows that the son of a high official in the Carter administration is living with a woman in Washington, D.C., out of wedlock. He has not run that story, deciding not to visit the righteousness of the father upon the son.)

"Basically, public officials are human beings," Maxa says. "They spend as much time thinking about whether they'll have a woman companion for the evening as your average Pittsburgh steelworker—or your average newspaper reporter, for that matter. Gossip is part of a gradual trend to humanize the newsmakers, which I think is healthy."

Maxa has had one close brush with gossip himself. Diana McLellan, Maxa's rival gossip columnist at *The Washington Star*, told his wife, Kathy, that there were rumors the couple was separating. Maxa called McLellan and said, "What is this? Where are you getting this shit? Because it's just not true." He still gets a little flushed just remembering the incident. "I hung up the phone sweating, thinking how horrible it would be if that appeared the next day in print." (It didn't.)

Driving through the city later, we pass the Capitol, spotlighted stark white against the night sky.

"You know," Maxa says, looking up wistfully at the Stars and Stripes waving gently above the dome, "as much as I bad-mouth this town, sometimes when I look up at that flag, it makes me want to cry." His voice breaks slightly and a chuckle burbles out. "Well, not exactly cry." ●

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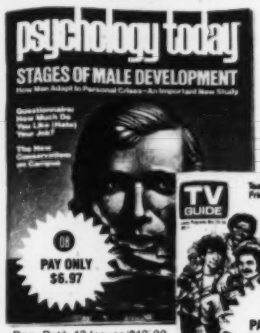

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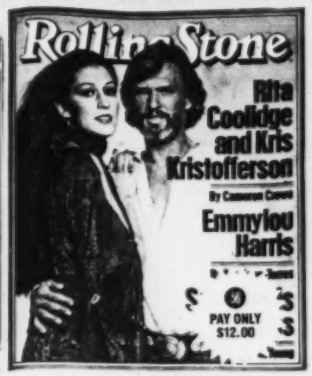

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BOOKS/BY GEOFFREY WOLFF

BOTTOM FEEDING

Prick Up Your Ears
by John Lahr.
Knopf
(302 pp., $15.00).

What a title! John Lahr got it second-hand—thank God—from the subject of his biography, the comic British playwright Joe Orton, murdered by his homosexual lover in London, the summer of 1967. As Lahr remarks, "The phallus is sometimes playfully invoked in the titles of [Orton's] work: *Up Against It, Prick Up Your Ears, Until She Screams.*" Priapic urgency was one of his governing themes; and his governing principle, in life as in art, was license. His advice to a homosexual friend was to "do whatever you like as long as you enjoy it and don't hurt anybody else." Of course, if you want something badly enough, you might hurt to have it. Orton, his skull bashed by a hammer till his brains flecked the room of his frustrated "Personal Assistant," would have understood: "Anger predominates when I see something I can't have."

License, if absolute, is anarchic. Anarchy is a companion of violence, but also, as Lahr is at pains to show, of comedy. *Prick Up Your Ears* attempts the daunting task of anatomizing Orton's comic gifts and strategies even as it details his squalid life and death. About sensations, the biography is sober. About people who do indeed "hurt" other people, it is kind, and usually respectful. About murder, *Prick Up Your Ears* is also about laughter.

Lahr, a theater critic and novelist, has written one previous biography, *Notes on a Cowardly Lion* (1969), concerning his father, the great Bert Lahr. Bert Lahr, contained and often morose offstage, trafficked onstage in calculated anarchy. Onstage, he was, like Orton's characters, crazy as a fox. His father's job, as Lahr understood it, was "simply to *make*" people laugh. "It is hard to imagine," Lahr wrote in his father's story, "*the laugh* as an absolute value. However, it has been the one absolute in my father's life, the focus of his imagination." And, as Abe Burrows told Bert Lahr's son, if the audience doesn't laugh, "it's death. Literal death. Comedians always used the phrase, 'Boy, I died last night.'"

Lahr continues to explore the verbal companionship between mortal violence and laughter: "The stage clown's appetite for vindictive triumph can be seen in his language for success: He 'kills the audience,' 'lays them in the aisles,' 'slaughters them,' 'knocks them dead.'"

Joe Orton was born John Kingsley Orton, on the first day of 1933, into an English working-class family of pinched means and emotions. Thirty years later his first play, *The Ruffian on the Stair*, was performed on BBC radio, and thereafter success followed success, with West End and Broadway productions of *Entertaining Mr. Sloane, Loot* and *What the Butler Saw*. Lahr's summary of this last-named suggests the environment of the others: "Torture, nymphomania, transvestism, incest, blackmail, bribery parade across the stage while psychoanalytic prattle twists experience into meanings all its own." (One of the principal props of Orton's last work was the detached, cigar-like phallus of Winston Churchill.)

Orton took care to insist that his work was not fantasy but reality—what Lahr, with pardonable inflation, calls "the ultimate outrage." He wanted his outrageous stage acts played straight, with conviction and gravity. The producer Charles Marowitz described Orton's world as "profoundly bad and irresistibly funny."

Orton's world was bizarre, and if it wasn't "bad," then bad has no meaning—a position Orton might have been willing to take. He spent six months in prison for defacing and stealing library books. Why did he steal the books? he was asked. "I wanted these books but haven't been able to afford them. That's why I took them." His partner in this crime was Kenneth Halliwell, the prematurely bald man seven years Orton's senior who murdered him and then killed himself by ingesting 22 Nembutals.

Halliwell's life was "profoundly bad," and not in the least "funny." He watched his mother die moments after a wasp stung the inside of her mouth. One morning, as a young man, he came downstairs to the kitchen and found his father with his head in the oven, dead: "When he discovered his father in the kitchen, Halliwell stepped over the body, turned off the oven, and put on the kettle. After his morning tea and shave, he reported the suicide to the next-door neighbors." (When Orton's father was hit by a car that fractured his skull, Orton observed, "That won't make any difference to his brain.")

However they may have suffered, whatever their deprivations and provocations, these are a pair of bottom-feeders. Two things may be said for Orton: He wrote extraordinarily well, and he was sufficiently loyal to Halliwell not to leave him. The latter of Orton's virtues cost him his life. It was a life of petty crimes and high ambitions. His sexual life, much of it lived in underground toilets, is chronicled here in stomach-turning detail.

But Lahr has a point to make about locutions such as "stomach-turning," and he makes it intelligently: "The words 'sick' and 'filth,' so often levelled at Orton's work, contain a fear of infection." This is true. It is also true that by the time of Orton's death it was no easy trick to get people to use words like "sick" and "filth." Epochs like ours take on the character of pornographic novels: Each novelty must be topped by the next, yet the body's apertures are finite, and their geography known. It's hard to be subversive in an age that retains no shared values to subvert. Flannery O'Connor understood the dilemma. Lahr, quoting her, does too:

"When you can assume that your audience holds the same beliefs as you

Illustration by Michael Ng

do, you can relax a little and use more normal means of talking to it. When you have to assume that it does not, then you have to make your vision apparent by shock—to the hard of hearing you shout and for the almost blind you draw large and startling figures." Thus Orton, so desperate to display the cracks in the wall, pointed at them with a sledgehammer. Still, he was "devoured without being digested."

And Kenneth Halliwell, so desperate to show Orton how unhappy he was, hit Orton with a hammer, ensuring that Orton wouldn't notice anything, ever. Orton and Halliwell met as students at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, where both aspired to be actors, and both failed. Halliwell devoted his life to failure and "could never forgive Orton his happiness." Orton charmed, Halliwell repelled. The stagehands at rehearsals of his lover's plays called Halliwell "Mrs. Orton." Halliwell wore a wig to hide his baldness; it didn't hide it very well.

If this was intolerably painful for Halliwell, it was made worse by Orton's swings between condescension and want of pity. "I won't have you monopolizing the agony market," Orton told the agonized Halliwell, who remembered well enough that it had all begun differently, when Orton (now rich) had lived off Halliwell's inheritance (now almost gone), and had typed Halliwell's novels (all unpublished), and been educated by him. They slid past each other fast, Orton coming up the greasy pole and Halliwell down. "Murder," Lahr writes, "made them equal again." So Halliwell believed, but I can't believe Lahr does.

Prick Up Your Ears is a courageous enterprise. *Notes on a Cowardly Lion* was written from complex love, examining from experience the craft of a much-loved comic performer. It brought with it a subject who had created its author, and its author had spent his life in contemplation of his creator. Central to John Lahr's years of contemplation was the simple question: Why is Bert Lahr funny? The biography was a natural, a book about which no reader could ask the question writers hate most: Why did you write about *him*? Many readers will ask, and must be forgiven for asking, why did Lahr write about *Joe Orton*? I'll presume on Lahr's behalf to deliver some answers: because Orton interests him, because Orton wrote good plays and Lahr writes about plays, because comedy—subversive, anarchic, dangerous, priapic—is a grave, even grim, business. This time Lahr crawled into the lion's mouth, down its throat and through its guts. He's seen a lot in there, has much to tell, and none of it is pleasant. ●

MOVIES/BY RICHARD CORLISS

HOLLYWOOD'S HEART OF LIGHTNESS

In the movies these past few years, a lot of things have declined—especially decadence. The bull market for movie decadence came in the early seventies, when Western Civ. was enduring a crisis of conscience, when standards of morality were loosening up (or falling apart) and when newly independent directors began tripping on their own fantasies. Three major American preoccupations—politics, violence and sex—were blending, and producing that keen sensation of excitement and paranoia. Violence was political. Politics was sexual. Sex was violent. And the most influential movies of a decade ago juggled these paradoxical equations like so many glass balls of nitro. In Dennis Hopper's *Easy Rider* the components were politics and violence; in Arthur Penn's *Alice's Restaurant*, politics and sex; in Sam Peckinpah's *Straw Dogs*, sex and violence.

To complement these urgent new thematic concerns, a new filmmaking style emerged: dark and voluptuous, mannerist, threatening—in a word, decadent. Some directors, like Fellini (*8½*) and Joseph Losey (*The Servant*), had been constructing baroque mud castles since the early sixties; now they were joined by Hopper, Penn, Peckinpah and—the two young masters—Ken Russell and Bernardo Bertolucci. Russell's biopics of composers, sculptors and bishops (as if the *Lives of the Saints* had been turned into art-porn coffee-table books) perfected the Helmut Newton mode of sadistic chic—or, as it came to be known, Concentration Camp. In *The Conformist* and *Last Tango in Paris*, Bertolucci attempted to merge personal and political histories, pleasure and pain, into a single, sinister mood that suggested the apocalypse was lurking around every Rome or Paris street corner. But an earlier generation had already provided the most fatal brew of politics, sex and violence: the Nazis. And with movies like *The Damned*, *Cabaret* and *Night Porter*, filmmakers surrendered to the seductively fetid appeal of demonic decadence.

Decadence is, as much as anything, a feeling in the pit of your stomach. You feel excited, and a little sick. It's the feeling you get from looking at a particularly lurid sexual display, or a sudden act of violence. With the Vietnam War on everyone's mind, and with the Supreme Court haphazardly restricting explicit sex in films, the mid-seventies emphasis in movie decadence changed from sex to violence. These were the years of the monster movie, in several fascinating variations. The "monster" could be an act of God (as in *The Poseidon Adventure* and dozens of disaster movies) or a design of the Devil (as in *The Exorcist* and its many rip-offs). It could vent its malignancy on the sea (*Jaws*), in a small town (*Carrie*) or on the streets of a nation's decaying cities.

This last subgenre, the urban horror movie, was the scariest—a confirmation of every apartment-dweller's gaudiest fears. The shadows in each alley or hallway held the threat of a Mafia hit man (*The Godfather*) or a silent, smiling cabbie (*Taxi Driver*) or even a mild-mannered architect turned into a one-man posse (*Death Wish*). What was worse, if you lived in a big city, you couldn't shake this fear off as you left the theater. You were walking out of the coming attraction, and into the main feature.

It should have been clear at the time that moviegoers were going to get tired of punishing themselves. And moviemakers were going to fall back, exhausted, on a waterbed of light comedies and love stories. The old formula for a box-office success—give 'em what they can't get on TV—was adapted to: Give 'em what they can get on TV, only better. In fact, this had always been so. In 1969, the trendsetting movies may have been *Midnight Cowboy*, *Easy Rider* and *Alice's Restaurant*, but the top-grossing film was a Disney comedy, *The Love Bug*. In 1974, *The Exorcist* was outgrossed by *The Sting*. And because audiences were flocking to both kinds of movies—sunshine fluff like *The Sting* and nightmare thrillers like *The Exorcist*—it was difficult to generalize about the mood of the American public. (A good thing, that. The "American public," and especially the moviegoing public, is a matrix of shifting constituencies—a mare's nest for the social scientist, or for the movie critic who's trying to get a fix on this bizarre decade.)

What's different—and depressing—about hit movies in the past year or two is not that there are so many soft-focus Ken-and-Barbie pictures on the charts, but that there are so few nightmare movies. You really *can* generalize about the box-office champs of 1978. From *Star Wars* to *Grease*, from *Hooper* to *Heaven Can Wait*, from *Animal*

Epic! Epic!: *The Deer Hunter* dares to fail at being great

House to *Up in Smoke*, from *The Goodbye Girl* to *An Unmarried Woman*, the year's hits are mellow, modest and, for the most part, undemanding of their viewers. Even *Saturday Night Fever*, with its gang bang and its gutter language, was at heart a working-class update of the Astaire-Rogers musicals. It's the Warm Bath school of moviemaking. Paranoia has been replaced by complacency; vaulting ambition has given way to a suffocating desire to please. The mavins of decadence—Fellini, Losey, Hopper, Penn, Peckinpah, Russell, Bertolucci—are taking longer between projects, or finding it harder to get work. In their stead is the new Film School Generation of directors—George Lucas, Steven Spielberg, John Milius, Brian De Palma, John Carpenter, and more, many more—who want (in the words of writer-director Paul Schrader) "to make the movies they saw as children."

This isn't necessarily an ignoble impulse. For close to 50 years, Hollywood kept making the movies we all saw as children. The very phrase "Hollywood movie" conjured up the image of a certain kind of film: conservative, glamorous, fast-moving, heavy on the sentiment. Then, as the younger filmmakers tried to assimilate influences from the European movies of the early sixties, the "Hollywood movie" became more amorphous and ambitious. Now, it seems, we're back where we started. With the naughty words removed, just about any of 1978's hit movies could have been made, and been a hit, 15 or 25 or 40 years ago. Nostalgia is the sincerest form of scholarship. And film scholars (we're *all* film scholars) can appreciate the knowledgeable care with which they're made.

But there's got to be something more to American movies than strolls down Memory Lane. And by "something more," I don't mean a return of the nightmare movies; there, the sense of dangerous excitement quickly calcified into shtick, and the shocking scenes of violence degenerated into a showcase for the special-effects men. No: Hollywood's savvy young generation of hit-makers needn't choose between retooling the dream factory's assembly line and lobbing grenades into the audience. Those are both adolescent impulses—the first, that of the good student; the second, that of the juvenile delinquent. *Godfather III* is no more alluring a project than *R2D2 Meets Cheech and Chong*. Maybe Francis Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (scheduled for August 1979 release) will be the turn-around film. Or Paul Schrader's upcoming *Hard Core*. Or an unheralded film by some unknown kid from Cleveland. Whatever it is, it will have

***Movie Movie:* Say Hello to Hollywood**

to be inspired by something outside the dark, comforting womb of the movie house.

One thing about year-end reviews like this: You can always look back, and shudder—or look ahead, and hope. A lot of people have pinned their hopes on **The Deer Hunter** (and a few people have already opened their shudders). Say this for *The Deer Hunter*: It's not a remake of a beach-party movie. Indeed, as you sit through the three hours of Michael Cimino's Vietnam epic, and sense the talent and intent in every frame, you may wonder whether it's meant to be the *best* war movie ever made, or *every* war movie ever made. *Sergeant York, Since You Went Away, The Story of G.I. Joe, The Best Years of Our Lives, The Bridge on the River Kwai*, even *Coming Home* and a sneak preview of *Apocalypse Now*—it's all here, sketched in loving, painful, angry strokes. *The Deer Hunter* screams "epic" at you. It grabs you by the lapel and says, "Call me masterpiece."

Some of my colleagues have already taken the film up on its dare. Perhaps they're impressed by its sheer audacity. Virtually every character, situation, feeling and shot is so rigorously overdone—the movie stares you down so solemnly—that you may be intimidated into taking *The Deer Hunter* on its own terms. You may, for example, take its depiction of Ukrainian-American family life—with the brutal, potbellied fathers, the stumpy Old World mothers, the young men who spend much of their time spraying beer over each other, knocking out their girlfriends, running naked through the streets and shouting "Fuckin' A!"—as a series of archetypes, instead of crude stereotypes. You may believe that, in a Pittsburgh suburb, as late as 1973, an entire community would willingly send its boys off to Vietnam, and welcome one of them back a year later with the phrase, "We won." You may be so eager for a 1978 movie that calls for strong emotions—feelings of fear and pity and rage—that you'll surrender to *The Deer Hunter*'s impact, and respond. Woody Allen's *Interiors* was the token Deep-Think movie of 1978; *Deer Hunter* is Deep-Feel.

As you may have guessed from my badgering tone, I find it difficult to take the movie seriously. And yet I'm almost charmed by the seriousness everyone connected with the film has brought to it. Of the leading actors, only Meryl Streep radiates conviction with every movement (possibly because, as the only important female character, she's allowed to be lifelike instead of larger-than); but even the excesses of performers like Robert De-Niro and Christopher Walken have their own fascinating intensity. Director Cimino may leave out crucial narrative points, and linger, fatal seconds too long, over each carefully composed shot; but that's also a measure of commitment to his own grandiose design. These weaknesses are *The Deer Hunter*'s greatest strength—because, in a year of timid moviemaking, they trumpet the film's daring to fail at being great. We can paraphrase the famous Thurber cartoon about the wine expert: *The Deer Hunter* is a naive domestic movie without any breeding, but I think you'll be amused by its presumption.

It may be that after seeing *The Deer Hunter* you'll say to yourself, "I've endured enough Seriousness for a while—now I want to go to a *movie*!" If so, I have just the thing: **Movie Movie**. Yes, it's the distillation of all the tendencies I've been complaining about. It's modest, gentle, sentimental, and it refers to nothing outside of old movies. *Movie Movie* is an evocative parody of the Warner Brothers programmers of the thirties; in fact, it means to recall a night at the movies in those dear dead days when everybody went. It's a double feature: The first film is "Dynamite Hands," the saga of a poor boy's rise to the top of the boxing world; the second, "Baxter's Beauties of 1933," is a Busby Berkeley backstage musical.

As written by Larry Gelbart and Sheldon Keller, directed by Stanley Donen, designed by Jack Fisk and performed by a cast that includes (in both "features") George C. Scott, Trish Van Devere, Barry Bostwick, Red Buttons, Eli Wallach and Art Carney, *Movie Movie* is the apotheosis of all those *Car-*

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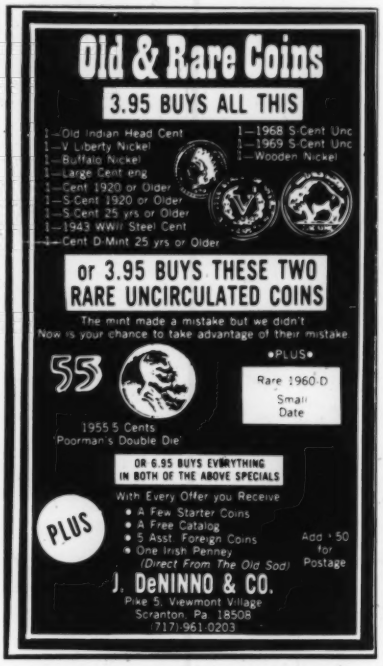

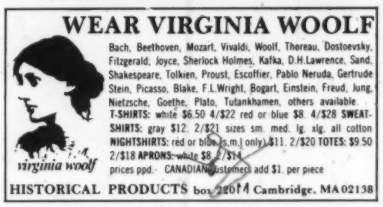
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ol Burnett Show movie parodies—done with affection and intelligence, and a realization that behind the clichés was a knowledge of the storytelling craft, honed and compacted till it gleamed like an archetype. The *Movie Movie* people know what they're doing, as they should: Donen codirected *Singin' in the Rain*, and Gelbart coauthored *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. The entire production is a happy reminder of the ensemble spirit of Hollywood's Golden Age, when people were too busy making movies to worry about making Art—which is how, sometimes, they did.

Amid all the teen pix and nostalgia, five films were especially notable for their intelligence, their passion and compassion, their belief that even movie characters can be more than screen-deep. Not surprisingly, these films have generated squalls of controversy, buts and rebuts. All serious discussion is welcome; it beats arguing over whether John Travolta or Warren Beatty has the bluer eyes.

1. **Days of Heaven**. "Lovely to look at, but cold and empty," said the detractors of this Panhandle love story, as if it were a Halston Frigidaire. There *is* something of the art history exam to this series of gorgeous, meticulous images of farm animals, windswept wheat fields, rushing water, the occasional enigmatic face. There's also something more: a mind behind the eye, an intelligence that connects each image to one or more of the film's characters. The eye belongs to cinematographer Nestor Almendros, the mind to writer-director Terrence Malick—and the most interesting face to playwright Sam Shepard, righteous and tender in his movie debut. United States; Paramount.

2. **Autumn Sonata**. "Powerhouse performances—but a mother and a daughter just don't yell at each other like that!" Altman, Scorsese, Bertolucci and dozens of other directors are allowed to bend their stories toward the surreal; only Ingmar Bergman is required to toe the naturalistic line. As it happens, Bergman provides enough clues to suggest that this matricidal psychodrama needn't be taken literally: the stylized flashbacks, the increasing shrillness of the daughter's attacks, the use of claustrophobic close-ups in the film's last hour. Like *Long Day's Journey into Night*, *Autumn Sonata* is the most chilling kind of horror story—in which, just once, the members of a family dare to unleash every real or imagined antagonism. And since the "monster" (the parent) is a victim as well, it's also a primal love story. Ingrid Bergman and Liv Ullmann do give powerhouse performances. But they're not exactly reading the Yellow Pages here; they're acting out a catalog of the nightmares every parent and child have had. Sweden; New World Pictures.

***Days of Heaven*: Best film of 1978**

3. **An Unmarried Woman**. "A fairy tale for sentimental feminists. Jill Clayburgh becomes a liberated Ms., but ends up as That *Cosmo* Girl." It's a natural inclination of the Committed to want to turn movies into wall posters. But writer-director Paul Mazursky has never been a believer in Better Living Through Ideology. He recognizes that people—in particular the middle-class soul-searchers of *Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice*, *Blume in Love* and *An Unmarried Woman*—are extremely complicated human mechanisms. They contradict themselves and frustrate the people they love. They're sad and, as Mazursky sees them, very funny. If Mazursky wants to mix his canny observations of Life In These Fragmented States with a little old-fashioned fantasy, he's entitled. And so is Clayburgh's Erica. As a reward for working at being a grown-up human being, why shouldn't this unmarried woman find an Alan Bates at the end of the rainbow? (The award for Best Supporting Actress goes to Lisa Lucas, as Clayburgh's daughter. No contest.) United States; Twentieth Century-Fox.

4. **Pretty Baby**. "It romanticizes life in a New Orleans whorehouse, and leaves everything else dead." I defer to my more skeptical colleagues' knowledge of Louisiana bordellos; and I agree that some of the supporting players, under the watchful eye but tin ear of French director Louis Malle, speak their dialogue in a stilted fashion. But let's not make the mistake again of demanding that an Impressionist painter sketch a picture of the *demimonde* so it looks like a police lineup on the six o'clock news. At the center of Malle's mural is an odd, tender and believable love affair between two outsiders: an eccentric photographer and a 12-year-old hooker. As the mismatched lovers, Keith Carradine and (especially) Brooke Shields turn Malle's period portrait into a most moving picture. United States; Paramount.

5. **Get Out Your Handkerchiefs**. "Vile, sexist, misogynistic . . . *blecchhh*!" Though it was seen by no more than 2,000 people at this year's New York Film Festival, Bertrand Blier's sex comedy set enough tongues wagging to assure that controversy would greet the film's theatrical premiere this month. It's about a man (Gérard Depardieu) who'll do anything to please his wife (Carole Laure)—and that includes forcing a lover or two on her strong, pliant frame. At issue is whether Depardieu is a loving husband or a klutzy manipulator. He may, of course, be both (as I think he is), and Blier may be daring us to disapprove of this charming *naif*. I suggest you let your guard down and simply enjoy this amoral tale, with its quartet of engaging performances. After the movie's over, you may ponder its meaning and—be my guest—get outraged. France; New Line Cinema.

The bottom half of the Top Ten comprises the cream of this year's crop of genre movies—traditional Hollywood themes and styles, but with some twist that radicalizes or transcends their origin. 6. **Blue Collar** is Paul Schrader's version of the John Garfield working-man melodrama, but full of anger and despair at both the bosses and the unions. 7. Walter Hill's **The Driver** will remind you of the murky *film noir* gangster movies—and of their existential European counterparts. 8. **Halloween** may be only an exercise in Hitchcockian style, but what style! John Carpenter is the most accomplished new director since Martin Scorsese. 9. **Movie Movie** you know about. 10. **The Buddy Holly Story** (directed by Steve Rash) is old-fashioned in its theme, style and characterizations; it makes believable a kind of movie we thought could engross us only on *The Late Show*.

Acting Awards. Actor: Gary Busey, *The Buddy Holly Story*. Actress: Jane Fonda, *Coming Home* and *Comes A Horseman*. Supporting actor: Richard Farnsworth, *Comes A Horseman*. Supporting actress: Lisa Lucas, *An Unmarried Woman*. ●

ONE FOR THE ROAD/BY JONATHAN Z. LARSEN

FINAL TRIBUTE

As befits any true journalist, let me begin with a plagiarism. It was Edith Piaf who said "*Je ne regrette rien*," and that is the note that I and the other editors of *New Times* would like to go out on. Piaf is as good a person to crib from as anyone, because our magazine has been so like her: diminutive, controversial, occasionally shrill, always aggressive. But there is a difference, of course: Piaf succeeded where *New Times* failed—in the marketplace.

Whenever a magazine goes under, the passive construction is invariably trotted out to protect the feelings of everyone involved. It is said that the magazine "folded," as if struck by some supernatural and unexpected blow from the outside. But that is seldom what happens. Usually the people on the inside, particularly the editor, have simply misjudged what readers wanted.

From the beginning, it was our hope that there was a place out there for a medium-sized magazine that did not have to be sold on the basis of celebrities, sex or "service journalism," but rather on the strength of solid reporting by the best writers we could find. We emphasized reporting because we wanted raw meat, not reprocessed clichés and fresh-frozen media events. And we sought out younger writers, because we hoped to be the forum for a new generation of journalists, not yet won over by the siren call of Hollywood, not yet established or jaded enough to turn out articles-as-wallpaper, measured to fit between the perfume ads and the recipes. We were determined to make the magazine a haven where journalists could practice their craft at its best. And on that score, we think we were successful.

During its five years, *New Times* ran dozens of stories that would have appeared nowhere else. They would have been considered too risky (Dr. Nork, Mayor Cianci, Synanon), too nasty (The Ten Dumbest Congressmen, Earl Butz's Racial Slur, The Berkeley Rapist) or simply too long in

this age of journalist-as-caption-writer (The Malling of America, America's New Poor). Many *New Times* stories, such as this summer's investigation of the Black Panther Party, even seemed to run counter to our own supposed "sixties sensibilities."

There was a time when people applauded our irascibility and unpredictability. In 1975, columnist William Safire could describe *New Times* as having "an adversary relationship to the world"—and mean it as a compliment. But as we moved further into the sugar-coated seventies, it became increasingly obvious that we were working against a very strong tide.

It had been publisher George Hirsch's idea that there was a wide gap between the journalism of the alternative tabloids and the slick newsweeklies and often ossified monthlies. He was right, but halfway through our short life we realized that something strange had happened. The "alternatives" and the newsweeklies had closed ranks to help forge, along with *People* and the like, a new journalism of celebritude. *Time* and *Newsweek* floated hot-air balloons for Bruce Springsteen, Cher and Cheryl Tiegs; *Rolling Stone* gave parties for Jimmy Carter. Rather than being in the middle, we found ourselves more and more alone pursuing topical public-affairs reporting and investigative journalism—or, as *Newsweek* recently put it, "somber articles on the environment and cancer." As exhilarating as this high ground was, it became clearer with each passing month that there was inadequate commercial foundation to support our editorial product. The advertisers, always somewhat mistrustful of our readers, drifted to other, easier-to-define and even newer magazines that were sprouting up. And our readers understandably continued to take umbrage—to the point of defecting—over some of the ads we did publish. A few months ago, Exxon plugged nuclear power in our pages; within weeks, we had received more articulate letters on that ad than on any single story we had published. The letters invariably asked how *New Times*, the first magazine to cover Karen Silkwood and Sam Lovejoy, could possibly print such an ad.

We were faced with the decision of changing our editorial direction drastically or going out of business

The war between readers and advertisers never was resolved, and neither were the other, more undermining financial problems. We were faced with the decision of changing our editorial direction drastically or going out of business.

Participating in that decision was hard enough, but delivering one's own obituary—that's much harder. I am particularly uncomfortable being left to write the last word on this of all pages. Final Tribute has always been my favorite feature of the magazine; now, thinking of all the whimsical essays on Americana that have graced this column, I feel like an elephant among the daisies.

But *New Times*, as a subject, belongs here, side by side with diners, barber shops and country stores. Like those, we hope we have served our purpose; like those, we hope we will be missed. ●

Jonathan Z. Larsen is the editor of New Times.

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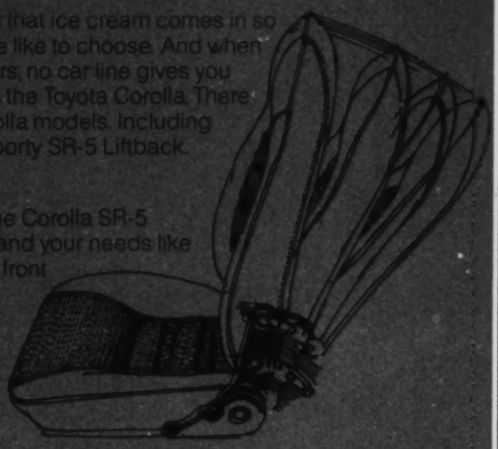
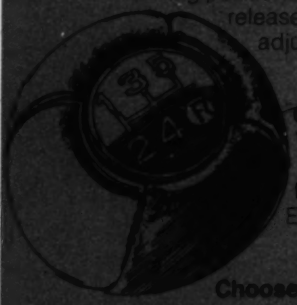
ONE REASON WHY COROLLA IS THE WORLD'S MOST POPULAR CAR.

It's the same reason that ice cream comes in so many flavors. People like to choose. And when it comes to small cars, no car line gives you as many choices as the Toyota Corolla. There are 10 different Corolla models. Including this great looking sporty SR-5 Liftback.



Choose a car that fits. The Corolla SR-5 Liftback adjusts to fit you and your needs like it was custom-made. Settle into the standard reclining front bucket seats and you can choose from a multitude of driving positions. Open the rear hatch with the remote release, and the split, fold-down rear seat adjusts four different ways to carry cargo.



Choose a car that's well-equipped. When you buy an SR-5, you won't have to choose many options. So many things you'd expect to pay extra for are standard. Power assisted front disc brakes for sure stopping. MacPherson strut front suspension for surer handling. Even the AM-FM/MPX Stereo radio and steel belted radial tires are standard.

Choose Toyota quality. Choose the Corolla SR-5 Liftback, and you get one standard of quality, Toyota's standard—the best. SR-5's (and all the Corollas) are built with welded unitized body construction to help prevent squeaks and rattles. Doors that fit. And fully transistorized ignition for surer starting. Choose a Corolla SR-5 Liftback and you'll see why we say, "If you can find a better built small car than a Toyota...buy it!"

YOU GOT IT.

THE COROLLA SR-5 LIFTBACK. **TOYOTA**

DEWAR'S® PROFILES

(Pronounced Do-ers "White Label")

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S. ALLEN COUNTER

HOME: Cambridge, Massachusetts

AGE: 32

PROFESSION: Professor, neurobiologist

HOBBIES: Jungle exploration, film making, archery.

MOST MEMORABLE BOOK:" Origin of Species" by Charles Darwin

LATEST ACCOMPLISHMENT: While continuing neurobiological research in the South American jungle, he discovered a little known Bush Afro-American tribe, the first black slaves in the Americas to gain independence.

QUOTE: "I am thrilled that my research and films have enabled me to contribute to the enlightenment of American culture. Only by being aware of our past can we deal with the present and future."

PROFILE: Energetic, warm, penetrating. Driven by a thirst for new knowledge that may lead to new truths.

HIS SCOTCH: Dewar's "White Label".